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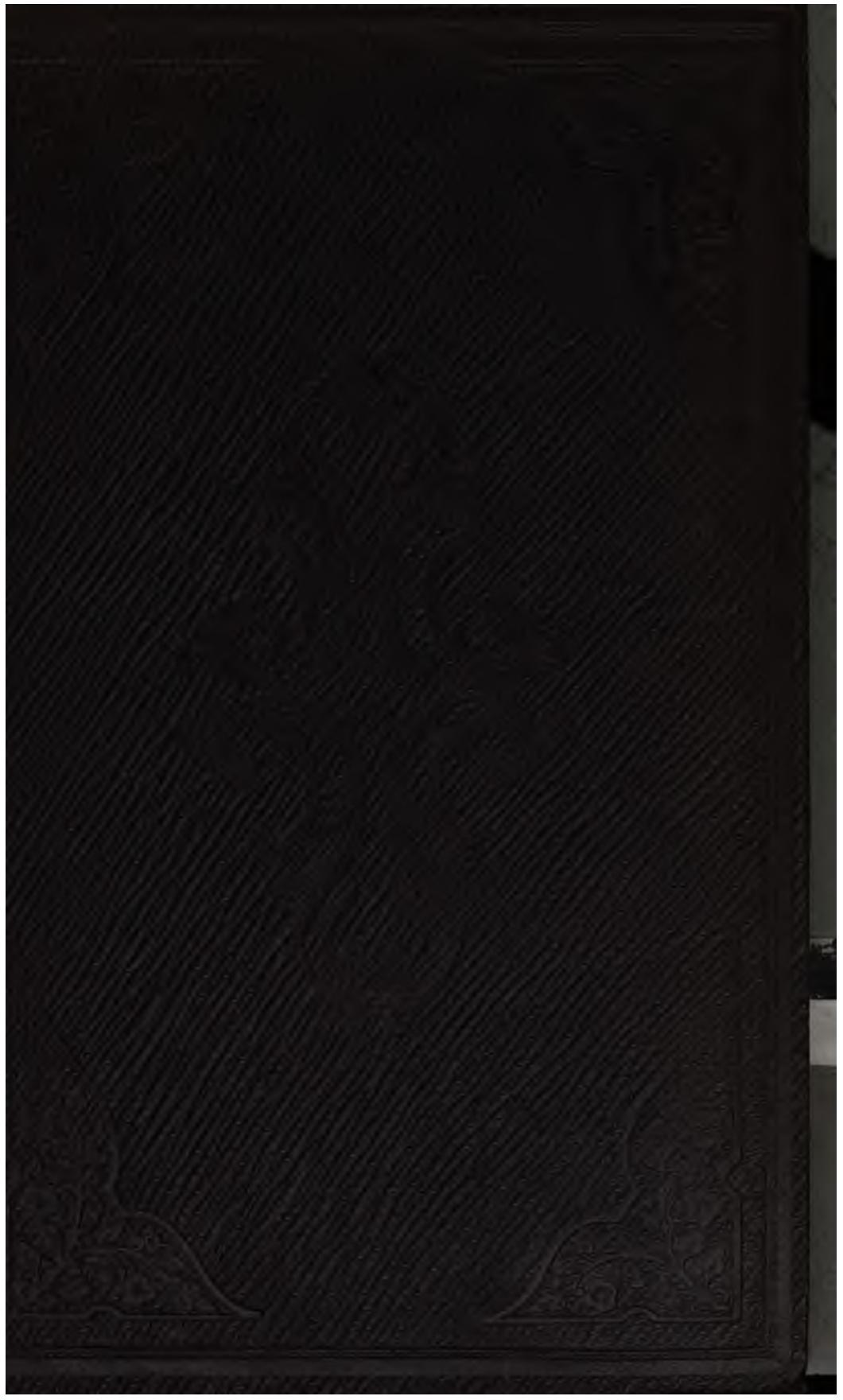
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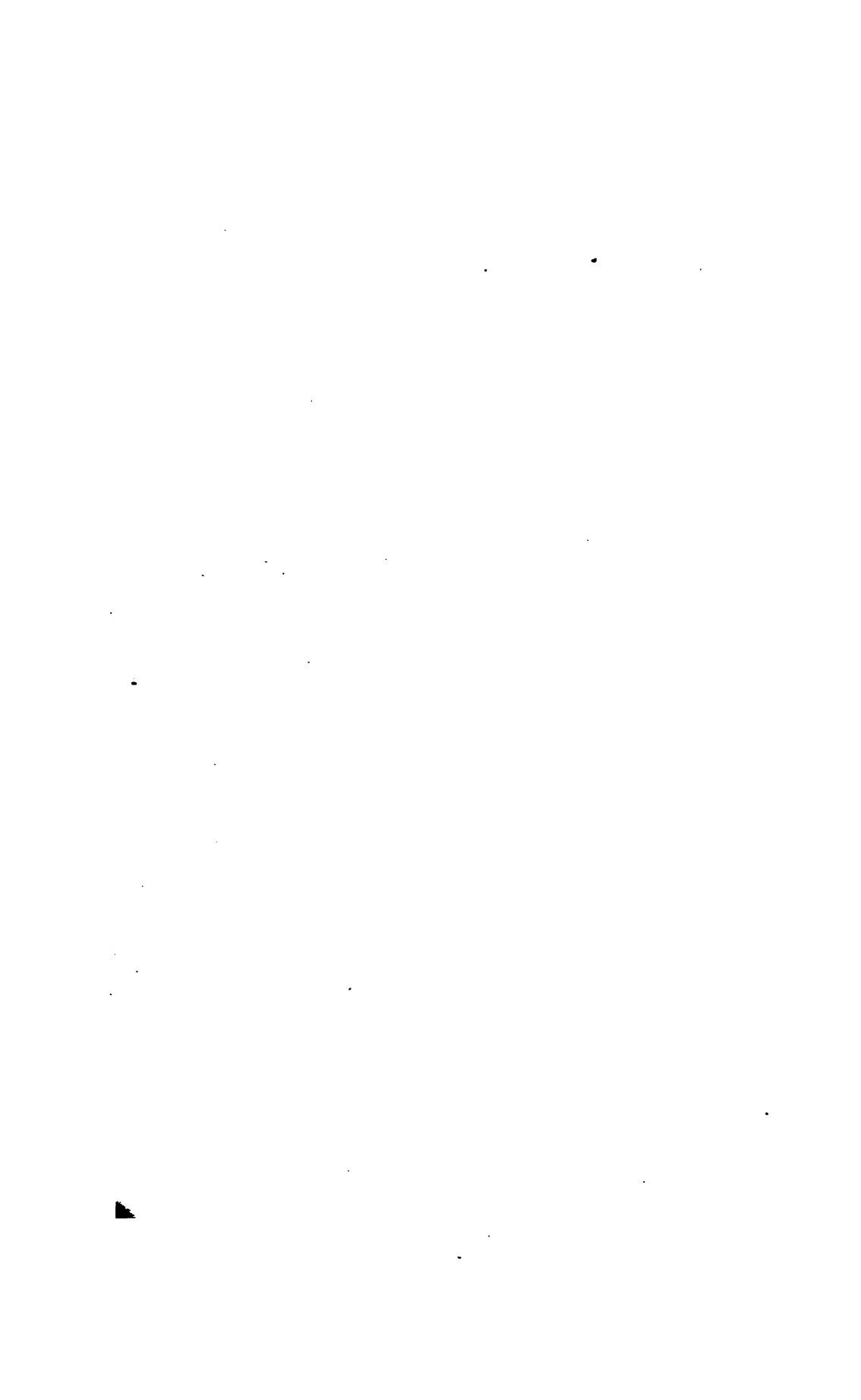
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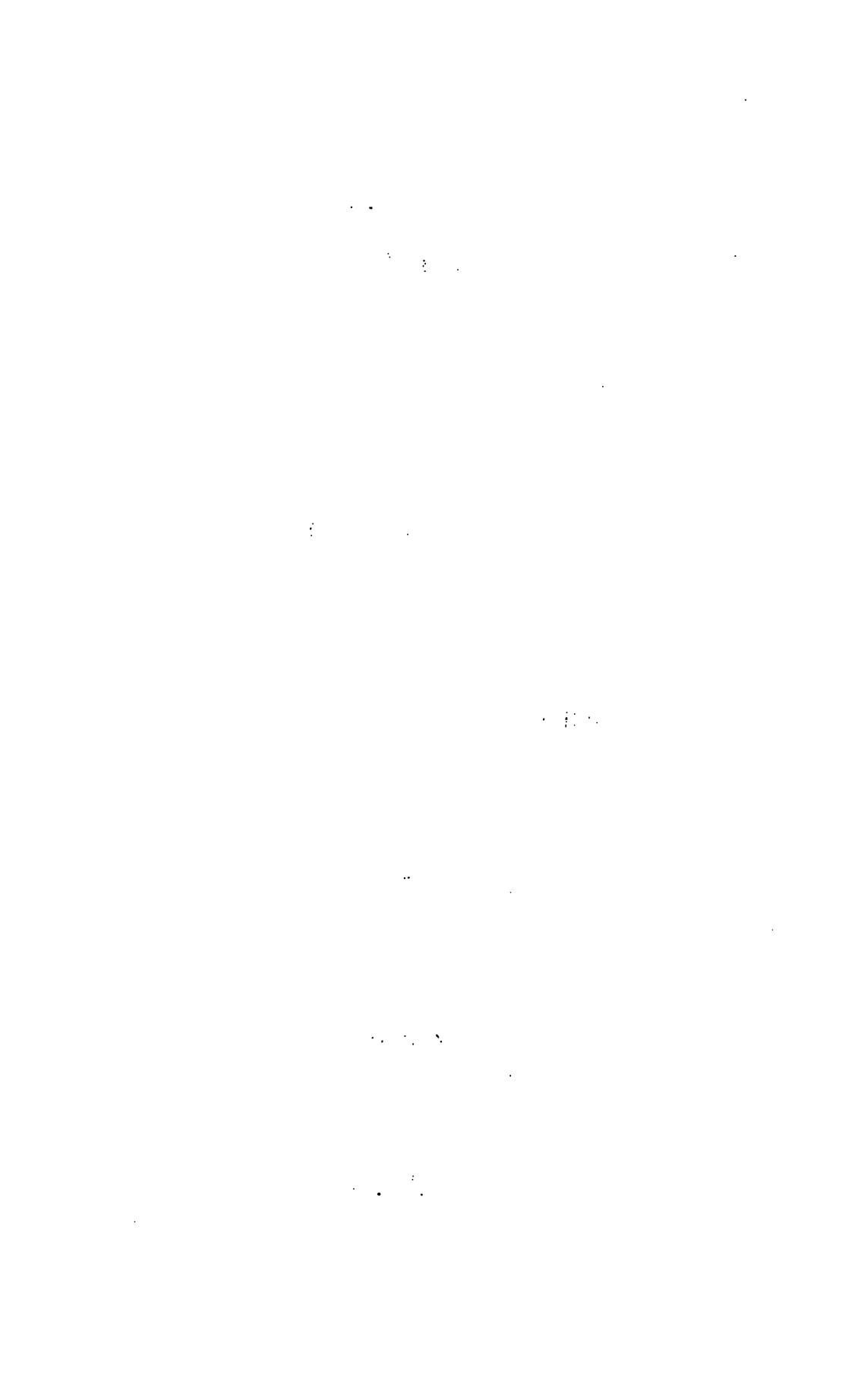


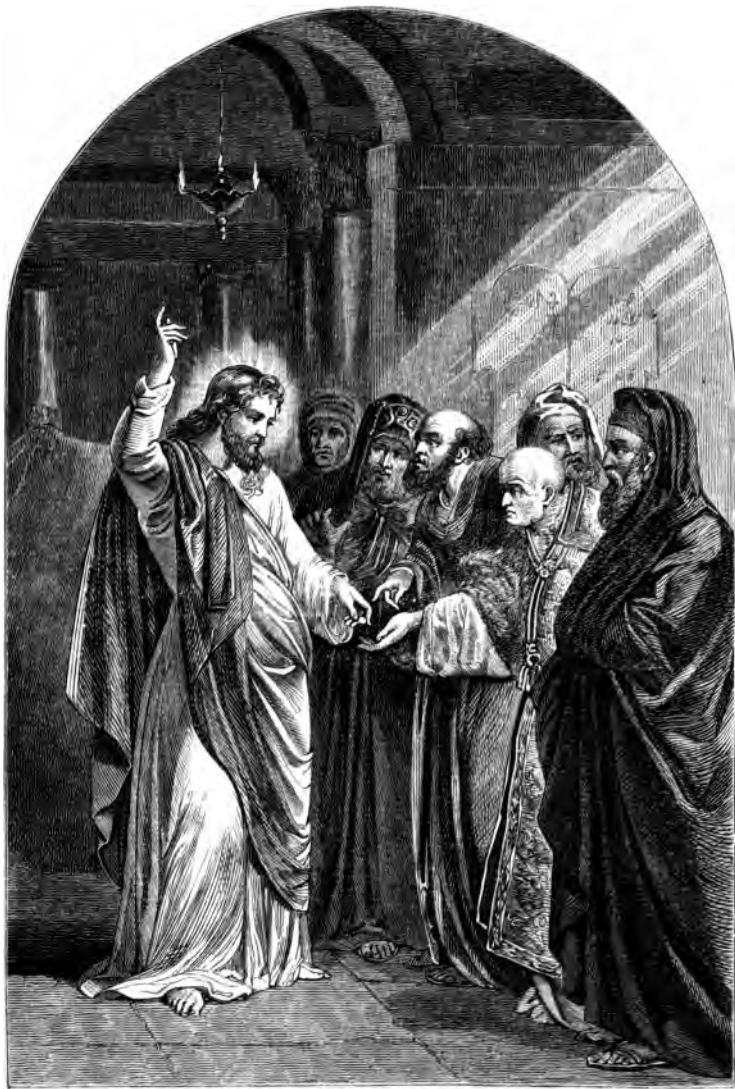






"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things
that are God's."





"Render to Cesar the things that are Cesar's, and to God the things
that are God's."

H E L P S
TO THE
THOUGHTFUL READING
OF THE
Four Gospels.

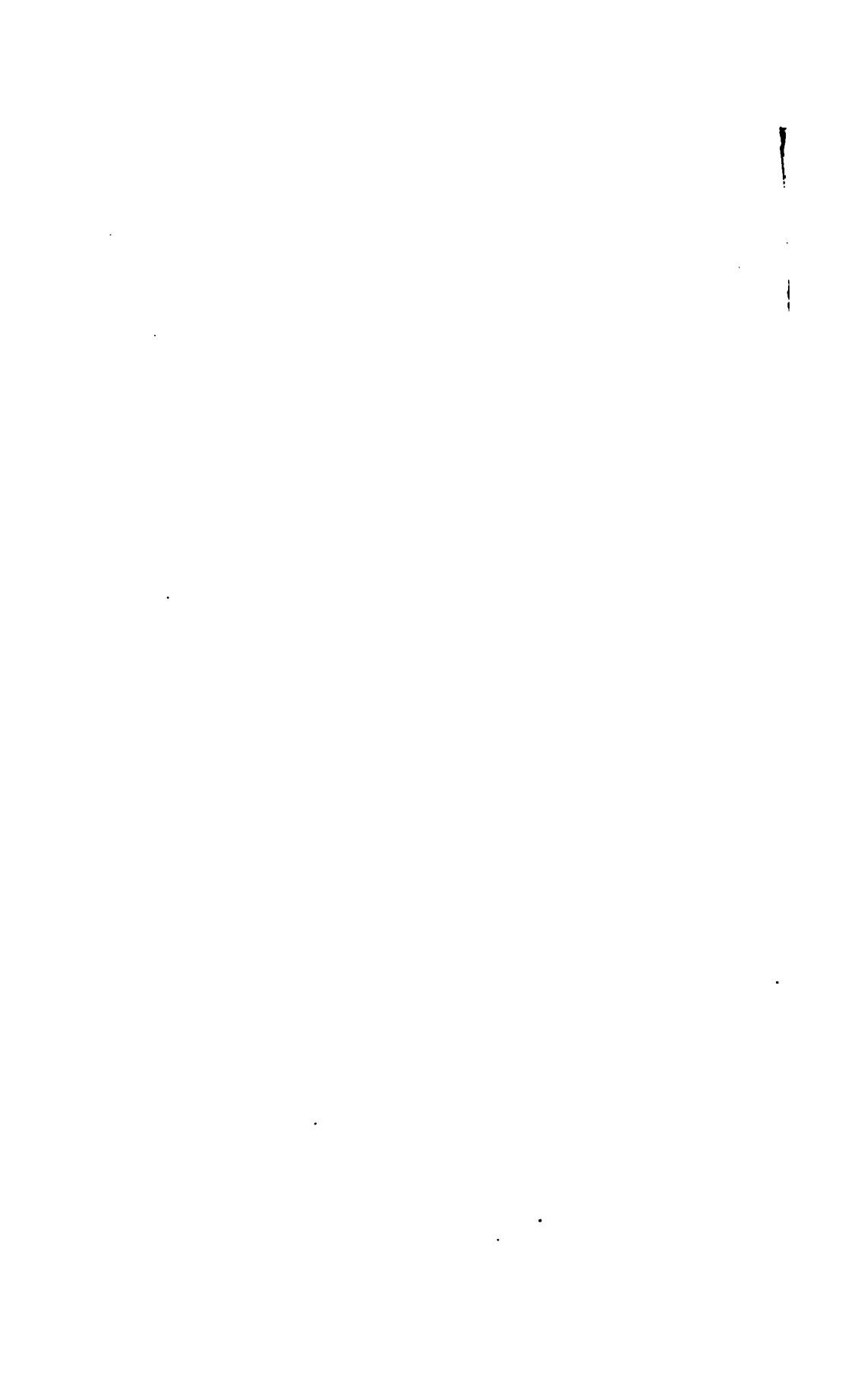
BY
HENRY STEBBING, D.D., F.R.S.



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107. C. 5.



I AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATE THIS VOLUME

TO

W A L T E R J U S T I C E, E S Q.

G. P. N I C H O L L S, E S Q.

AND

W I L L I A M S A N D B Y, E S Q.

IN

Testimony

OF

MY THANKFULNESS FOR THEIR PERSONAL FRIENDSHIP,

AND FOR THEIR CHRISTIAN ZEAL.

IN PROMOTING EVERY USEFUL DESIGN CONNECTED

WITH MY CONGREGATION AND DISTRICT.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW.



INTRODUCTION.

IT was universally acknowledged in the ancient church, that the Matthew spoken of as the author of this Gospel, was the Apostle known by that name, and earlier by that of Levi, the publican. There was a like agreement in representing it as originally written in the Hebrew dialect, then spoken in Palestine; and as the first of the four Gospels, in order of publication. Abundant materials, as was the case with St. John, were present to the memory of Matthew, or lay in scattered memoranda before him. Aided by the blessed Spirit, he selected those which might prove most useful to his design; and he has given to the Church, of all ages, so precious a record of the words, and actions of our Lord, that, while it is marked by peculiarities which shew at what time, and among what people, it was written, its pages shine with a light which makes it ever new to the children of God.

HELPS TO THE THOUGHTFUL READING
OF THE
FOUR GOSPELS.

The Gospel according to St. Matthew.

CHAPTER I.

VERSES 1—17.

The Gospel of Saint Matthew is a strictly historical narrative, and therefore commences, like that of St. Luke, with an account of our Lord's historical descent. It was not, however, the object of the writer to give genealogical tables minute in every link or division. There was no necessity for legal exactness in any other respect than that required to prove the direct line of descent. St. Matthew, therefore, referred generally to such documents as he might have the opportunity of examining. The seeming deficiencies which existed in these tables, as that, for example, in verse 11, did not affect the fidelity of the main account; and it was far from his purpose to enter into any critical disquisition of a point left undetermined by the most learned of his countrymen. His object was fully attained by proving incontrovertibly that Jesus was the seed of Abraham; the son of David.

VERSES 18—20.

The miraculous conception of our Lord was necessary to his perfect purity, or freedom from every taint, in the way of hereditary corruption. But his miraculous conception in no wise whatsoever affected the completeness of his human nature. He was made in all things like unto his brethren, sin only except. If any one question this, we answer, that, if the first man Adam was certainly not less a man, nor less perfect in all the qualities of human nature, because created

immediately by God of the substance of the earth, Christ undoubtedly ought not to be considered as a less perfect representative of the human race, because formed of the substance of the Virgin Mary, his mother.

In every circumstance of this momentous history, we behold the wonderful wisdom of God's appointments. Mary had been espoused before her conception of the Messiah. It was necessary that he should have legally a human father; and this Joseph was, in all respects, in which the law was concerned. Whether he would take Mary to be his wife, after that which had occurred, depended wholly upon his faith in the divine vision. It is especially told us, that he was a just man; and the just shall live by his faith. Even the betrothal, or espousals, according to ancient custom, gave Mary so direct a claim upon Joseph, that it would have required a legal process to separate them; but their marriage was necessary to secure for Jesus, humanly considered, all the home rights belonging to him, in his outward relation to Joseph. Hence the direction given to the latter to take unto him Mary as his wife.

VERSES 21—25.

The name Jesus, being the Greek form of Joshua, was familiar to the ears of every pious Jew, as significant of a deliverer, its proper and well known meaning. Joseph, no doubt, at once recollects the venerable captain of his people, who first led them over Jordan, and gave them possession of the promised land. Nor were there wanting to a mind roused like his to solemn thought, loftier and more mysterious associations belonging to the sound of that word Joshua, Jesus, Saviour. The vast roll of prophecy, as well as that of history, lay spread before him; and it is not improbable that he was the first to apply to the infant redeemer, the sublime appellation of Emmanuel, as well as that of Jesus.

C H A P T E R II.

VERSES 1—3.

The place and time of our Lord's birth are stated with historical precision, and both the one and the other formed the subject of prophecy. That the Bethlehem in which our Lord was born might not be mistaken for the town of that name in the tribe of Zebulon, it is described as Bethlehem-Judah. It had also the title of Ephratah, given it in very ancient times, apparently on account of the fertility of the neighbourhood. By the prophet Micah it is spoken of as little among the thousands of Judah, (v. 2.) but its comparative insignificance in other respects, was amply compensated by the fact, that out of it should come forth the "ruler in Israel," and it is to this latter circumstance that the Evangelist refers when he says that it is "not the least among the princes of Judah." The Herod, in whose reign our Lord was born, fulfilled unintentionally by his successful ambition, that most remarkable prophecy of the patriarch Jacob, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come."—Gen. xlix. 10. Herod was an Idumæan; a stranger to the covenant people of God. Kings or governors, lawgivers, as the latter are termed, preserved the ancient dignity of Judah for many generations: but just at the time of our Lord's coming, the last vestige of early glory vanished. A foreigner assumed the sceptre, and became the governor, of Israel; and the personal character of the tyrant was such that it made the line of separation between the two great historical periods, more than ever distinct. It was from the Romans that he obtained the power and title of king; and he sought, in all ways, to promote the interests, the tastes, and habits, of that people.

In the original, the wise men are termed Magi, and are thus designated as belonging to a class of persons partaking

equally of a philosophical and religious character. It is doubtful from what particular region they came, but Arabia and Persia were, at that time, the abode of several sects remarkable for their mixture of learning and devotion. Some very ingenious arguments have been advanced by astronomers, and modern critics, to show that the star which these wise men saw, was not a meteor, or a newly created star, but the splendid appearance produced by the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in a certain part of the constellation Pisces, and which conjunction, it is most curious to be said, did really take place just before the birth of our Lord. The first appearance was in the month of May, in the year of Rome, 747; the second in the month of October, and the third in that of November, of the same year. To those who were accustomed to interpret every movement of the heavens as significant of good or evil, so magnificent an appearance, and that in a quarter of the sky where the signs of important occurrences were chiefly looked for, could not fail to betoken some great event. This is an interesting and important circumstance, and, if really applicable to evangelical history, affords one of the most beautiful illustrations of the truth, "that the heavens declare the glory of God." But all attempts to account naturally for the phenomena of divine dispensations must be viewed with extreme caution. They often spring from the pride of reason, and are opposed to the spirit of faith. In the present instance, Divine Providence may, indeed, wonderfully have ordered that the movements of the planets should subserve the grandest of its designs; but it is equally open for us to believe, that God did also create for the purpose which he had in view, the luminous body which guided, and seemed to wait upon, the steps of the pious magians.

It was not, however, the star alone which led them to Jerusalem. A belief had long prevailed, that sooner or later, a mighty monarch and deliverer would rise in Judæa. This

may be accounted for by the respect in which the ancient prophecies were held not only immediately among the Israelites, but among those people and tribes to which they had come in the more or less perfect forms of tradition. Herod could hardly fail to be troubled at the words of the wise men. They sounded as the knell of his dominion ; and Jerusalem, which, though "the city of the great king," had transferred its allegiance to the worldly and half idolatrous usurper, naturally shared his trouble and alarm.

VERSES 4—9.

It is a circumstance well worthy of observation, that the most wicked and sensual men are always ready to employ the services of the ministers of religion, when temporal anxieties can, by any possibility, be relieved through the means or instruments of an ecclesiastical order. The chief priests and scribes were evidently masters of all the general information which existed on the subject of the inquiry instituted by the magi. To them, therefore, Herod applied ; and their answer shews, that the meaning of Scripture was, at that time, so well understood, that had the same interpreters been employed thirty years afterwards, our Lord must have had many more followers from among the learned and powerful men of his nation. Herod seems to have had no wish to bring the scribes and magi together. He conferred with the latter privily, and sent them away with his own instructions, thinking, probably, to impose on them in regard to points, where to his subjects, and especially to the higher class of Jews, his real intentions must have been at once evident.

VERSES 9—12.

The language in which the movement of the star is here described, is hardly consistent with the supposition that it

was the splendour only of a known planet. That it went before the travellers, and that it stood over the house where they were to find the object of their search, are expressions far more proper to a sign created for one especial purpose, than to any of the grand heavenly bodies moving in their proper orbits, and fulfilling their part in the general system of nature. The re-appearance of the star was a cause of fervent joy to the wise men. It confirmed their hopes, and filled them with a profounder sense of the salvation about to be revealed than any which they had before experienced. Their feelings at this time were strikingly emblematic or predictive of those which believers in the Gospel enjoy, when, after patient inquiry in the appointed ways of truth and knowledge, God is pleased to make his presence known to them by special manifestations of grace and love. The wise men had no doubt, when they entered the house, that the offspring of Mary was the destined deliverer whom they sought. They rendered Him a worship expressive of this faith ; and, according to the common practice of ancient times, the gifts which they offered were significant of the notion which they had formed of his nature and offices. For the king they had gold ; for the priest they brought frankincense ; to the appointed sufferer for his race they gave myrrh. It is not stated what particulars God communicated to them respecting Herod, but their minds were evidently in that state in which any Divine admonition is readily and implicitly obeyed.

VERSES 13—15.

As Jesus, in his human nature, was like unto his brethren, in all respects, sin only except, so he was, from his earliest infancy, the subject of providential care. Hence he was protected from the persecution of Herod ; and while the flight into Egypt, the country where He could be most

effectually concealed, and which could be reached without great difficulty, effected this, its main purpose; it also fulfilled a typical, incidental prophecy: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt."—Hosea, x. i. According to the method of adaptation adopted by the New Testament writers, the circumstances in which Israel, as a people, was placed in his infancy, corresponded to those in which Jesus, the proper head of the true Israel, was placed at this beginning of his earthly course.

VERSES 16—18.

The wrath of Herod received its most powerful stimulant from his fears. It could not fail to strike his excited imagination, that the wise men had discovered more than they thought it safe to tell him. He well knew that they would have returned at once to Jerusalem, had there been no mystery in what they learnt at Bethlehem, or had it not borne an unfavourable aspect for his future prosperity. The order which he gave marks the sudden outbreak of rage, rather than the wisdom of an old and subtle politician. He had ever proved himself reckless of human life, and this sanguinary act was such a one as he might be expected to perpetrate in the moment of wrath; but he must have been blind indeed, could he have seriously entertained a hope of thus cutting off the Prince, or Deliverer, appointed by God, and foretold by prophets. The allusion to the passage in Jeremiah is another of the adaptations spoken of above. Rachel was buried in the neighbourhood of Ramah. Jeremiah, by a forcible and pathetic image, represents her as beholding from her tomb the sorrows of her children dying, or passing into captivity; and the Evangelist, recording a calamity not less indicative of the continued miseries of her children, adopts the language of the prophet, not intending to represent the latter event as corresponding

to the former, but intimating, by the allusion, the connexion between the ancient and present miseries of Israel.

VERSES 19—23.

Herod's death removed the danger which his jealousy of the infant Saviour created. His successor, it is probable, was too much engaged in establishing his authority by ordinary political means, to care about remote contingencies. The recal of the Holy Family was unmodified by a reference to Archelaus. It was simply to his own human prudence that Joseph yielded in turning aside, and seeking the remote town of Nazareth as a place of safety. Though this was his home, many considerations would probably have induced him to prefer bringing up Jesus in one of the more conspicuous towns of Judæa, but for his fear of Herod's son. The word Nazareth, or Nazarene, is applied in various forms in Scripture to signify poverty, self-denial, separation from the ordinary pursuits of life, or holiness, as connected with contempt of the world. It is simply to show a remarkable coincidence between what is generally said in the prophets, respecting the character and sufferings of our Lord, and the name of the place in which he was brought up, that the Evangelist makes the remark which closes the first section of this narrative.

C H A P T E R III.

VERSES 1—4.

The expression “in those days” may refer not so much to the history of Jesus himself, as to the period marked out for the introduction of the new dispensation. In that especial season, John the Baptist performed the great work of preparation, announcing the approach of the Kingdom of Heaven, and choosing, for the scene of his labours, the wilderness of

Judæa, a spot sufficiently quiet and retired for the purpose of the preacher, but so situated as to render it easy of access to the inhabitants of the populous districts by which it was surrounded. When the call to repentance was founded on the fact, that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, a change of mind was excited by motives which had never before been suggested generally to the world. The Kingdom of Heaven is that kingdom which God establishes among men, by bringing them back to a state of voluntary obedience. Repentance is a necessary preparation for an entrance into that kingdom. Something more than mere sorrow for sin is meant by the original word. It implies a change of mind ; and whatever is comprehended in that idea, however difficult it may be, cannot surpass, in extent of obligation, the greatness of the proffered reward. The Kingdom of Heaven, as established through the medium of the Gospel, secures to the penitent a free remission of all his sins. In that kingdom the righteousness of Christ is supreme. It affords his people the abundant riches of grace, as imparted by the Holy Ghost, for all the purposes of regeneration, of quickening, purifying, and illuminating the whole inward being ; and within its borders the entire series of God's dispensations and promises have their substantial and visible fulfilment. It must, no doubt, have been, that in the greater number of instances, the call to repentance breathed, at first, only terror into the hearts of the hearers. Their most pressing anxiety would be to flee from the wrath to come ; but when this alarm produced its proper fruits, and the idea of the Kingdom of Heaven became clear and full to the mind, infinitely important must it have appeared to the hearer, to let nothing be wanting to his penitence which might tend to render it a full preparation for the coming kingdom. So great an actor in the designs of Providence as John the Baptist, could not fail to be the subject of prophecy.

Hence, in the typical labours of Elijah, and in the words of Isaiah, we readily trace all the main features of his sublime character and office.

VERSES 5—10.

The preaching and personal appearance of John were well calculated to excite general curiosity; but the language of the Evangelist implies, that the crowds which came out to him were inspired by a much stronger feeling than that of popular surprise. For the most part, they were baptized, confessing their sins. A transient impression was made even on the Pharisees and Sadducees; but they shrunk from the stern inquisition of the preacher, and hence we are told (Luke, vii. 30) that “they rejected the counsel of God against, or, within themselves, being not baptized of John.” The fruits of repentance can never spring from the soil of formal righteousness, nor can any descent from, or mere outward union with, the faithful, secure us salvation. God, indeed, will have a people; Abraham shall have his children; Christ his Church; but rather of the stones or the clods of the field would God raise up inheritors of the promises, than fulfil them in those who put their own righteousness in the place of His.

VERSES 11, 12.

The baptism of John was symbolical of repentance and its consequences. It represented the putting away of sin, and that entrance into a new state of life, which must always follow a true change of mind. If this baptism was more than symbolical, it became so by the gift of Divine grace. In so far as such grace was bestowed, it was a baptism, unto repentance, not only as representing that contrition, but as aiding and confirming it. Still, even supposing that a Divine influence attended it, its operations were confined to

the preliminary objects of the Baptist. The baptism which was to be given by Christ, was not different merely in its degree of power, or of influence on, the mind, but in its very nature, or character. This is evident from the language of John. His baptism with water, and the Redeemer's baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire, had nothing in common but that which must belong to all rites and institutions which have a Divine origin and Divine purpose. Had it been otherwise, the baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus would not have been necessary in the case of those who had been baptized with the baptism of repentance. In this respect, the case recorded in the 19th of Acts is of great importance to the proper understanding of the two rites.

VERSES 13—17.

By our Lord's expression, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," we are led to conclude, that he regarded John's baptism as partaking of the character of a legal ceremony; as being, that is, a rite which it was proper to observe, because of its formal connexion with the present Divine dispensation. Certain it is, that he needed not a baptism unto repentance; neither did he need circumcision; but as the latter was a part of legal righteousness, so in its proportion, and in its relation to the methods employed by God for the salvation of his people, the baptism of John was formally necessary to Jesus. He would not have spoken of his own baptism, or of the communion of his body and blood, or of any of the grand spiritual mysteries of the Gospel, in similar terms. To fulfil all righteousness, in the sense of the phrase as then understood, was to attend to every particular ordinance constituting a part of the law.

CHAPTER IV.

VERSES 1—4.

Our Lord was now, in his humanity, under the immediate influence of the Holy Ghost: and hence we are particularly told that "He was led up of the spirit into the wilderness." That is, the gracious power, by which his whole being was possessed, led him, by a direct impulse, to try its force against the mightiest of all antagonists in the spiritual world. The temptations to which Jesus was exposed answered directly both to his nature and to the circumstances in which he was placed. It is in no wise necessary to suppose that the devil was ignorant either of his character or office. The kind of temptation which he employed was precisely such as the knowledge of his perfect humanity would suggest. Had Satan treated him, in this case, as a God, he would, indeed, have proved his ignorance of the economy of his nature. He knew, on the contrary, that as man, and only as man, he was the proper subject of temptation; and the subtlest wisdom could not contrive a trial more skilfully fitted to the occasion, than that which was now begun. The answer of our Lord, "Man shall not live by bread alone," was a plain but direct assertion of man's dignity as a spiritual being. Bread alone will not sustain us in our twofold nature; but in order to make the answer of Jesus applicable to his circumstances, we are to consider that, though the food which sustains the animal will not support the spiritual nature, the latter is so superior, so noble in its qualities, that when it is well sustained by its fitting nourishment, it will long support the body in the fiercest trials of its strength. Of this Satan could have no experimental knowledge; but it was pre-eminently felt by our Lord in his forty days' fast.

VERSES 5—7.

Any physical, or mere natural, difficulties, which may be imagined as attending this, or the following, temptation, can scarcely be considered worth a thought, when it is recollected, that the strongest agency, both mental and spiritual, short of that employed by God himself, was here brought into exercise. The resources of a being like Satan could surely be put to but a very slight proof, when nothing more was required than to transport a human frame from the neighbouring wilderness to a pinnacle of the temple, or from the temple to a mountain visible from its parapets. There seems to have been an intended connexion between the preliminary to the temptation, and the temptation itself. Satan conveyed our Lord to the dizzy height ; made him feel that he could uphold him ; and then bade him, by way of contrast, try the supporting hand of angels, as the ministers of the Almighty, of whom He claimed to be the Son. Jesus by refusing to tempt his Father did, in reality, prove his most implicit confidence both in his power and love. He who best knows God, will always be the farthest from desiring any unnecessary exhibition of his power. Convinced of his wisdom, he will patiently leave Him to determine when and how his people are to be delivered by especial interpositions of his providence.

VERSES 8—11.

Again we have to observe, that where such a being, as Satan, is concerned, it is vain to speak of difficulties, or impossibilities, in the way of accomplishing a purpose not absolutely contrary to the laws of human intelligence. The view of regions which lay far beyond the ken of ordinary vision, might readily be afforded by one, who, fallen as he is, is yet so mighty in intellect, and so abounding in those means and arts, without which he could never have retained

his control over so large a portion of our race. In the case however of Jesus, the very perfection and energy of all his faculties would aid an object of this kind ; and the vision, in itself grand and sublime, would stream before him, uninterrupted by any hindrance arising from the defects of a sinful nature. It is worthy of observation, that the word of God, with which our Lord met the temptation, was at once effective. Satan did not attempt to repel its force. He felt its invincible truth, and departed. The immediate appearance of angels, as in the garden of Gethsemane, seems to indicate, that Jesus suffered great distress and anguish during some part of this temptation.

VERSES 12—16.

By comparing the narrative of this gospel, with that of the others, we find that several events occurred between the temptation and our Lord's departure into Galilee. The tidings which he received of John's imprisonment, may either have led him to apprehend the persecution of his followers ; or it may have been, that the conclusion of John's ministry was the signal for the commencement of his own more open and systematic course of labour. Hence, on returning into Galilee, He speedily left the little and obscure Nazareth, and took up his abode in Capernaum, the most populous and important city in the country. Situated as it is on the borders of the lake of Gennesareth, it formed a busy and wealthy emporium. People of all classes and characters crowded its marts ; and the discourses heard in its streets or neighbourhood, would soon be reported throughout the land. The quotation from Isaiah shews, how the noblest passages of the Old Testament referred to the times and events of the Gospel ; and how, that only deserves to be regarded as the light of people and nations, which disperses the darkness of their souls, and opens to them the path of life.

VERSES 17—25.

Our Lord's announcement, that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, had, no doubt, an intended connexion with that of John the Baptist, whose warnings and exhortations must thus have been brought powerfully to the recollection of those who had heard him in the wilderness. The call of the four Apostles indicates both the power of Jesus, and the now rapid advance of his work. As the crowd thickened around him, so it became necessary that he should prepare labourers for the harvest. The toil to which he subjected himself; the remarkable results of his preaching; and the countless miracles which attended upon his word, are shewn with wonderful force in this brief passage of the Evangelist. His concise but pregnant language opens to us a scene, each object in which grows more and more distinct as we meditate upon it with faith and prayer, and, when beheld, serves to unite us by the strongest arguments of reverence and love to the wonderful being, who is thus revealed to us in his Gospel.

CHAPTER V.

VERSES 1—12.

A nobler proof could not have been given, that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, than this discourse. Had not God been ready to re-establish his power in the human heart; to grant peace to penitent man, and to sanctify him by his spirit, the precepts here given for his guidance could have found no living soil in which to take root. The word translated "blessed" may throughout be rendered "happy." Thus "the poor in spirit" are happy because to them pertains the Kingdom of Heaven. That is, the humility which attends a deep and sorrowful conviction of sin; of natural helplessness; of the utter want of whatever can constitute a claim upon the righteousness of God; and which takes from

the soul all pretensions to power, riches, or honour, making it as poor in its own sight as it is in reality; this genuine humility of spirit secures to those, of whose character it forms the basis, an abundant entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

They that mourn, have in their hearts the seeds of true happiness. Godly sorrow sends men to their heavenly Father. Discovering thereby the deceits of the world; the errors of their own reasoning; and the impossibility of finding happiness without holiness, they lay a new foundation for hope; form other plans of life; and going to Him who has promised to give the afflicted rest, they find they are comforted, for this especial reason, that they are mourners. The meek, though allied in some respects to the poor in spirit, are not to be confounded with them. Poverty of spirit is the result of convictions, the fruit of experience, when the soul has been long proved and humbled. Meekness, on the other hand, is a quality of character which it requires no severe trial to engender; but which, as the immediate product of Divine grace, is seen in the quiet temper, gentle dispositions, and unambitious conduct of those by whom it is possessed. The promise that they shall inherit the earth, has a peculiar force; being thus given to persons whose character is most opposed to the desire of wealth or power. But their meekness has helped to unite them to Christ; to make them joint heirs with him; and when he enters upon the possession of his kingdom, they shall share his glory, the subdued and renovated earth being a part of his lordly inheritance.

To hunger and thirst after righteousness, is itself a blessing, as proving the life and health of the soul. But to be filled with those graces; to be replenished with that heavenly food, which are promised to those who have these spiritual desires, is to partake of the highest enjoyment of which a created being is susceptible.

The merciful are happy in the promise and assurance, that the tender, compassionate heart shall not be left unblessed by Him, whose whole perfections are bound up in love, and who even in the wrath which is consistent with the most unquestionable justice, remembereth mercy.

As it is sin only which separates us from God, perverting the heart, obscuring the intellect, and rendering it averse to heavenly contemplation, so the restoration of our nature to purity and holiness will place us in a condition to enjoy the divine presence, and in such a manner that the vision of God shall be identical to us with his presence.

Peace-makers, in their several relations and circumstances, are the chief benefactors of mankind, the spirit and dispositions by which they are governed being alike fruitful of good, whether the sphere allotted them be more or less extensive. As they are called "children of God," it is evident that those only are properly "peace-makers" who adopt for their purpose means and methods accordant with divine truth. The habitual tendency of the mind to promote peace, and to select for this object the instruments which best exhibit the grace of God, must itself be a gift of grace. Happy are they who, endowed with this precious quality, find themselves working to the same end as heaven itself; helping to restore the primitive harmony, and to bring all things into the eternal bond of unity and love. They who are persecuted for righteousness' sake bear witness to the truth of God's word; and while they thus promote his glory they become, at the same time, the most powerful teachers to the world. The strength of soul which enables them to bear the sufferings and insults to which they are exposed, is both the fruit and the evidence of an inward life, abounding in those sublime qualities which render its possessor superior to earthly pains and vexations. Felt they cannot but be, as long as the mind and body are subject to the common laws of nature; but the desire to glorify God;

the caution with which the influences of grace are cherished ; the habitual view of heaven, and application of divine promises, more than counterbalance the sense of outward ill; and, "we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us," or, "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us," is the motto ever written on the hearts of these true soldiers of Christ.

VERSES 13—16.

Among the grander or more shining productions of nature, or those which are commonly viewed as means of luxury, little is thought of the simpler, but far more essential supports of life, or comfort. To the moral world, to man in his spiritual being, the graces of the Christian are of greater consequence and worth, than the noblest of mere intellectual gifts. But in proportion to the worth which they are thus said to possess, ought to be the care with which they are guarded, and the anxiety to preserve them in their native excellence and perfection. As the salt which has lost its savour is absolutely worthless, so the Christian name, the Christian profession, the Christian character, without the life of the Spirit, is utterly contemptible, and deserves the scorn with which the common sense of mankind is disposed to treat it.

But the true disciples of Christ are also the light of the world. Divine Providence has appointed them to be so. It is He who has exalted them as the ministers of truth; having lighted the candle himself, he has not put it under a bushel, but according to the various dispensations of his church, has always set it where it could best be seen. The conduct of God in this respect seems to be first referred to by our Lord ; and this is meet to be viewed as an example to the rulers of the church ; while the precept, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works," appears to

be founded upon the principle thus inculcated, and to be intended to encourage Christians, as lights in the world, to a full display of their gifts and virtues, letting neither sloth on the one hand, nor too much retirement on the other, prevent them from becoming living proofs of the power of the Gospel.

VERSES 17—20.

To a hasty or superficial inquirer, the teaching of Christ might seem opposed to the law and the prophets. The spiritual character of neither of the latter was generally understood, and hence the startling contrast between the teaching of the Scribes and that of Christ. But as there could be no opposition of design in any of God's dispensations, so it was impossible that he who came so pre-eminently to do the will of God, should intend to destroy the law or the prophets. On the contrary, as they were preliminary to the Gospel, he came to fulfil them, that is, to accomplish the very ends to which they were preparatory, and without the attainment of which they would in reality have proved false or useless. Hence turning from those who accused him of annulling the authority of the ancient faith, or its moral code, he solemnly warned his disciples, as well as the rest who heard him, that to break one of the least of God's commandments under pretence of zeal for the Gospel, would be to forfeit every hope of admission to the kingdom of heaven. The righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was founded on error or hypocrisy. It left out many of God's commandments, and yet it was with a boastful appeal to their zeal that they dared to accuse Christ of setting aside the law.

VERSES 21—28.

It was the object of our Lord, in this part of his discourse, to shew what the law of God really demands. The submission of the heart, or of the will and temper, is essential to

moral obedience; and by the instances, which our Lord adduces, it is evident, that this most necessary quality of righteousness had been wholly neglected by those whom he was now instructing. Unhappily for the world, the lesson which he taught is as necessary among us in this day as it was in ancient times. Except in the case of those whom his spirit has wholly renewed and sanctified, the obedience of the heart, the inward acceptance of God's law, the management and submission of the temper, enter as little into the religion of the ordinary run of Christians, as they did into that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

VERSES 29—37.

It is worthy of observation, that in the midst of the precepts which exhibit the true character of the obedience required by God, Christ intimates the nature of the discipline by which alone such obedience is rendered possible. So long as evil desires and covetousness ; corrupt thought and violent dispositions, the one symbolized by the right eye, the other by the right hand, prevail within us, we can render no rightful homage to God. Whatever pain, therefore, it may cost us, these evil passions must be crushed. Were our inclinations of the most natural and lawful kind, it would surely be better for us to sacrifice this or that wish, when found inconsistent with our general good, than to indulge the one appetite to the ruin of our entire being. How much more ought this to be the conclusion, when that which is to be sacrificed is something in itself base, and destructive of holiness ? The frequency of divorcements, and the multiplying of oaths, are sure proofs of mingled depravity, superstition, and corrupted civilization. This was the case among the Jews. It is equally so in some nations of modern times. In solemn judicial cases, oaths may be both lawful and necessary. The prohibition of our Lord is absolute as to all conversational oaths ; and so very

few official oaths are taken with a holy respect to God, that a Christian people cannot look with too much jealousy at their introduction.

VERSES 38—48.

We are always to consider the spirit and intention of our Lord's words, otherwise the mere literal meaning may involve us in doubt and perplexity; but in thus viewing the general scope of his precepts, we must be careful never so to interpret his words as to lessen their real force. It would be infinitely better to err in rendering a literal obedience to his directions, than to lessen their value, or direct application, through our unwillingness to adopt his pure and holy counsels. The exhortation with which the passage concludes, shews how very far our Lord is from countenancing the easy rule of expediency, with which the edge of evangelical truth is so often blunted.

C H A P T E R VI.

VERSES 1—4.

They who give alms, or who perform any other good act to be seen of men, have their reward when they are seen and admired. They can have no right whatever to look for a further reward. If, therefore, the blessing of God be desired, or if the fruits of righteousness in another world be the proper object of our hopes, let us take care that our motives be unmixed with a base pride or vanity; and, to be safe in this respect, let us strictly examine ourselves in whatever we do, so that we may never start from a wrong point, but may begin our course with the simple consciousness of a desire to glorify God. If then we be seen, the light which shines about us will be to his praise. We are not seen because we sought publicity; and even though we should have praise, we shall not lose the better and nobler reward.

VERSES 5—8.

Prayer is so essential a means of our communion with God; so necessary to the support of our souls; and so indispensable a part of the homage which we owe Him, that no greater folly, and few greater sins, can be committed, than that of vain or hypocritical devotion.

VERSES 9—13.

For humble, spiritual, and thoughtful minds, the prayer which Christ has taught his disciples is as full of meaning, as it is simple in diction. Such, indeed, is its character, that each of the petitions of which it consists is comprehensive in strict proportion to the degree of faith, knowledge, and affection with which it is uttered. The babe may lisp it with a meaning pure and beautiful: the most maturest saint; the most ecstatic prophet, will feel as he pronounces it, with all the ardour of his soul, that it has still a meaning higher and larger than that which he can give it.

The first sentence of the prayer confesses both the love and the majesty of God; and this is the proper foundation of all prayer. A knowledge of his power compels reverence; but nothing but the further knowledge of his goodness could compel us to wish Him to be reverenced, or to make that wish the subject of our prayers. “Our Father!” The highest sense in which we can use these words is that in which we address Him, when we are most conscious of our being born again of the Spirit, and of our intimate union with Christ. But that there are inferior states in which this address may be lawfully employed by men, seems plainly intimated by the fact, that Christ taught this prayer openly and generally, as that which his hearers ought at once to employ instead of the verbose, empty, and superstitious forms, common at the time among all classes of the

people. He adds no restriction as to when it should be employed ; and we are, therefore, not to suppose that his disciples, or others, were to wait till the Holy Spirit should openly give believers the title to address God as their Father, before they used this prayer. But though such were the mercy and tenderness which inspired Him, when he put such words into the mouth of every humble hearer of his doctrine, certain it is, that as a mere creature of God, man has no direct or legal right to approach the Creator with such an appellation of endearing relationship. Whatever might be his original privilege in this respect, he retained it no longer when he became a sinner. However low, therefore, the spiritual sense in which he now addresses God by the title of Father, still it is by a spiritual affection, and by a newly conferred right, that he thus begins his prayer. In this case, as in others, Christ anticipated the full power of his Gospel ; borrowing, as it were, grace of his Father, on the full credit of his sufferings and merits, that every word which he uttered might from the first have its evangelical meaning and force.

“ Which art in Heaven ” is added to the appellation of “ Father,” not only that He may be distinguished from all others to whom that title in any wise belongs, but that the glory, and the obligations which arise to us from our filial relation to Him, may be properly understood. In the expressed desire that his name may be hallowed, we primarily pray that he may receive the honour due to the perfections of his nature ; due to his power, holiness, and other attributes, all of which are comprehended in His name : but, by implication, we also pray for the conversion of the world, for only then will the name of God be universally honoured, when the various nations and families of mankind have been made partakers of His grace.

“ Thy kingdom come ! ” Here again, God’s own glory is

the primary object of the petition. He has the highest of all possible rights to the obedience of his creatures whether in Heaven, in this, or in any other world. That his dominion may be continually increased by the multiplication of beings rejoicing in his love, is a wish which every mind will entertain, as far as it is capable of meditating on the union of his creative power, and boundless benevolence. That those who have rebelled against Him may again become willingly subject to His rule, cannot but be the desire of the soul which has itself felt the converting, sanctifying, and illuminating influence of his grace, and which has thereby been brought back from a state of enmity against its God to one of heavenly peace. And still there is another sense in which this prayer may be offered up. God's kingdom comes, when, in answer to the hopes of his people, the force of His word is experienced more and more intensely in their souls.

In close connexion with this petition is that which expresses the earnest desire of devout hearts, that the Divine will may be done in earth as it is in Heaven. But closely as these two prayers are connected, and resemble each other, they are not identical. It is possible that God's kingdom may come, while the hearts and wills of his creatures are still estranged from his rule. By an act of his own omnipotence, He could, at any moment, subject every rebel to his sway. This, in one obvious sense, he will, in fact, do, when the scorners whom his grace has not reached shall be broken with a rod of iron. To pray, therefore, that his kingdom may come, without adding "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven," is to leave unexpressed that which equally concerns the glory of God, and the happiness of His creatures. The highest degree of good, the truest perfection, the most enduring happiness, will then be reached when God's will shall be done here below, as it is in Heaven. There nothing is wanting to perfection or enjoyment, because

there the rule of eternal love is universal and omnipotent. No higher degree of grace than this can be reached by any creature, in any state; and hence our Lord closes with the prayer, of which it is the object, the series of petitions which more especially regard the relation of his people to their God and father.

By the preceding petitions we are elevated to the contemplation of the Almighty, ready, through this prayer, to acknowledge us as his children; our thoughts are made familiar with His kingdom; and we speak of His will, obedience to which involves all spiritual and moral perfection, as capable of being done among us, even as it is in Heaven. Thus to use this portion of the Lord's Prayer as the real language of our hearts, is to assure ourselves, by the grandest and most direct species of conviction, of the present capabilities of our souls; of their affinity with the sublimest natures; of their individual interest in the most comprehensive proceedings of Divine Providence; and of their destination to glory.

While this first part of the prayer may thus be viewed as having a more immediate reference to the Kingdom of God, and the things of eternity, so the second part refers to those of present necessity; to our existence in this world, with all its wants, its sins, temptations, dangers, and sorrows. "Give us this day our daily bread" is both the cry of our own need, and the expression of our trust in God. To whom, indeed, can we ultimately look for the supply of our necessities but to the Creator, and Lord of the whole earth? And who can doubt but that he will consider our humble claims upon his bounty? Only let us follow the golden rule of seeking first his kingdom, and we shall never fail to see the promise fulfilled, that all other things shall be added unto us.

That having asked for our daily bread, we should be taught to pray immediately afterwards for the forgiveness of our sins, is itself a lesson of great significance. Our offences are mixed

up with our common life ; they most of them spring from its cares or pleasures ; and while we look to God for support, and are fed by his bounty, we ought never to forget, that sin unforgiven must, sooner or later, cut off the stream of mercy by which we are thus supplied. But sin, as such, is so great an evil, that whatever our enjoyments or expectations, they can have no real worth till this burden be removed. When God forgives us it is removed ; the remission of the guilt being ever followed by the grace which heals the wound, or corrects the disorder. This forgiveness is to us an absolute and daily necessity. We ask for bread because we cannot exist without it. Forgiveness is as practically necessary to the health and strength of our being : and the prayer for bread to sustain us in the one respect, should always suggest to us a sense of the danger which threatens us, if God's mercy, through Christ, helps us not in the other.

The words "As we forgive them, &c." contain an intimation, that we do actually forgive those who trespass against us ; and are not to be interpreted as if we meant to offer a condition, and to induce God to pardon us, by the argument, that we have a right to mercy because we exercise it, or will exercise it ourselves. It is the language of common experience and affection ; but it is evidently language which none can use but those who do freely, and from the heart, forgive the trespasses committed against them.

" And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." We still trace an immediate connection between each petition in this divine prayer. It is of little use to those to receive forgiveness of sins who, despising or neglecting God's mercy, immediately involve themselves in fresh transgressions. Temptation is sometimes the punishment of guilt, and this is one of the views to be taken of it in our use of the present petition. But it is also a trial of faith, a proof of duty, and, viewed in this light, we only pray against

it from the humble conviction of our weakness ; of our inability to sustain it, unless by the especial support of God. Even the ordinary troubles of life are too much for us when left to ourselves ; and hence there is a connexion between this petition and the first in the series, “ Give us this day our daily bread ;” and we pray God that we may, in no wise, be subjected to temptation as such, but that we may be delivered from evil generally, and from “ the evil,” whatever that particular evil may be which we have most to dread.

When we thus humbly pray against temptation, we may be sure that if it come, it will not be as the punishment of our pride, or as a snare ; but that coming under the control of divine wisdom, it will be accompanied with grace, and being borne meekly will bring forth in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness. A thoughtful and devout mind will be able to trace in the words of praise with which the prayer concludes, the fundamental principle, both of the faith, and of the ideas, out of which the substance of each of the petitions is derived.

VERSES 14, 15.

Though nothing which we can do has such merit in itself as to constitute a claim to God’s mercy ; yet, we see, from the instance here urged upon us, that there are things which being done according to his word, will be followed by proofs of his compassion ; so also we are here plainly taught that, though it is an act of God’s pure grace to forgive us when we forgive others, yet that, if we do not forgive them, this want of mercy on our part will effectually shut us out of heaven. Mercy to others cannot of itself justify sinners ; but want of mercy will set aside whatever might have led to their justification.

VERSES 16—18.

That which tends, in the way of discipline, to correct a proud or sensual disposition, or which, as a part of public

duty, may serve to indicate our care of God's judgments, ought to be regarded with the utmost respect, and to be adopted, under certain conditions, into our practice. But the instant things of this kind become formal and ostentatious, they not only lose their value, but become positively sinful.

VERSES 19—23.

However little the language of our Lord may agree with the common notions of mankind, the lesson which he here teaches is not only essential to our spiritual interests, but to our tranquillity and happiness in this world. The treasures which are perishable; the good which is unsubstantial and evanescent, cannot be worth more to the earthly than to the spiritual man. Whatever they may seem to be to the former, they can have no greater intrinsic value, and can confer no higher amount of enjoyment, whoever may be their possessor, than that which consists with their gross and limited qualities. This is at once apparent to him whose eye is single; that is, whose sight and power of observation are sufficiently healthy to enable him to discover the real nature of things. Our Lord added this remark in direct reference to the deceptious character of the things on which worldly men are so ready to set their affections. Could they but once discover the cheat of which they are the subjects, they would be ready to own that they were fools indeed to fix their hearts on things, which have so little intrinsic worth, and are so soon to perish.

VERSES 24—34.

The god of this world is mainly indebted for the power which he possesses among us, to the notion that we cannot do without him; that there are certain necessary helps to the support and comfort of this life, which can be best obtained by propitiating his favour. Let this error be dissipated, and we shall no longer think of serving mammon, instead of the true

God. That we cannot serve both is evident. Hence our Lord employs the whole strength of his argument in showing, that the care and anxiety, which make us so dependent on the world, ought never to have been allowed a place in our minds. He proves the folly of our suffering any dread, as to the future supply of what is needful to our subsistence, to induce us to sin, or to take part with mammon. God will never leave us while we continue faithful to his name; and as long as we have his blessing, we need never look beyond the present hour. All may be trusted to his united power, wisdom, and goodness. To see Him feeding and clothing the inferior creatures of his hand, and then to suppose that he will leave any of his own people and children to want, is grossly to deceive ourselves as to the nature of his providence. There is no contradiction in this to the grand rule which obliges us all to employ our natural faculties to the best advantage; nor are the trials of faith to which, under particular circumstances, God may sometimes put his people, inconsistent with the general assurance that the righteous are never forsaken. Convinced of this great truth, our first pursuit must be his favour and blessing. In their train will follow whatever is needful or good. A contrary course necessarily exposes us to the most biting cares; the most tormenting perplexities. Whatever service we render to mammon, he will never free us from this species of misery. It is by our cares that he holds us prisoners. But the very contrary is the case with God. He desires the worship of free and happy hearts; and as soon as we begin to render him faithful service, he practically convinces us, that his powerful hand is disposing all things for our good.

CHAPTER VII.

VERSES 1—6.

The precepts of our Lord, in this discourse, furnish us with the most effectual rules for preserving social as well as private happiness. There is no greater antagonist to the former than the love of censure ; that unamiable inclination to find fault, which puts the worst construction on that which may be doubtful, and never fails to visit what is really wrong with the heaviest condemnation. While charity and good will are banished from the bosom, in which such dispositions exist, the objects of an unfair, capricious, or too severe judgment will, in most cases, be provoked to resentment ; sorrow for real faults will be retarded, and the ties of brotherhood, if they before existed, will be irreparably destroyed. Our Lord, however, looking to the meanness of character, in which the love of judging and debasing others, commonly arises, warns the offender by a threat more likely to alarm a low and ungenerous mind than arguments of a more comprehensive nature. He simply tells the heartless censurer, that the severe rule by which he judges others shall be that by which his own conduct shall be tried. And, as this is the measure which his offences may expect at the hand of God, so, and we may suppose our Lord to have alluded to the common course of the world, every day's experience teaches us, that no people suffer more from the indignation of mankind, when detected in the commission of even ordinary sins and follies, than those who have been too ready to condemn them in others.

We cannot always, at first sight, catch the connexion between the several sentences in our Lord's discourse. Some may, indeed, be intended to stand distinct. In others it may have been broken through some unimportant transposi-

tion of the Evangelist himself; or possibly through an accidental oversight in some very early transcriber. But it ought to be the rule of every reader of Scripture not to adopt any supposition of this kind, till he have patiently meditated upon the apparently disconnected passages, and used his best endeavours to discover whether there be not some line, hidden under the surface of the meaning, which being traced will bring them both into one. Thus it is not quite obvious, at first, why our Lord should have followed the command, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," by the precept, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs," but it would be very rash to conclude that there is no proper connexion between them. "Dogs" and "swine" were epithets commonly applied by the Jews, and especially by the proud Pharisees, to all who did not partake of their own supposed righteousness. In the case of the poor Syrophenician woman, our Lord, for the moment, employed their language, well knowing that the allusion would be readily understood by his followers. Adopting, it may be, a similar method on the present occasion, when he spoke of dogs and swine, he but employed, by way of allusion, and severe rebuke of their uncharitableness, the language of the angry Scribes and Pharisees then listening to his discourse. It is thus, he says, you would speak ; it is thus you would judge. You would deny to the poor, penitent sinner, the means of grace and knowledge : but while there is a mote in his eye there is a beam in your own. But though this interpretation should not be admitted, the connexion of the passage may still be upheld. Thus, if we be not cautious in our judgment, rectifying it by charity to others, and severity towards ourselves, we shall be bad stewards of the means of grace ; and yielding to caprice, or blinded by error, shall be often found to hazard the interests of religion by intrusting them to those who are wholly unworthy of such confidence.

VERSES 7—12.

Having warned his hearers against encouraging dispositions, which would keep them in bondage to natural corruption, hardness of heart, and all its attendant evils, our Lord opens to them the broad path of evangelical mercies; assures them that prayer shall never remain unanswered; that to humble, faithful efforts, God will not fail to discover the hidden treasures of his wisdom; and that they who heartily desire to be re-admitted to their Father's house, and meekly pray at his door, shall be readily accepted. This loving assurance throws light upon the sternest part of the preceding discourse. The cold, hard-hearted censurer, trembling at the warning of the Lord, has but to pray, and his bad disposition shall be converted into generous compassion for the weakness and sinfulness of his race; and the dogs and the swine, and their cruel persecutors with them, only learning to practise the rules of the Gospel, shall find all that was base or discouraging in their condition, yielding to the power of the Divine spirit. That God will not refuse the choicest of his blessings to those whom He owns as his children, is proved by the simplest but the most striking of all arguments. Men, selfish and perverse as they are, hear the supplications of their offspring. Can it be supposed that God's love, in this respect, can be inferior to man's? The admonition in the twelfth verse, "Therefore all things, &c.," seems connected with the preceding instructions, first, as to the judgment of others, by the obvious rule of fairness and expediency; and, next, by the consideration, that we must not expect any of our prayers to be answered by God, if we pray in states of mind which render us unfit to approach him.

VERSES 13—20.

To those who gave sufficient heed to the teaching of our Lord, it must have soon become apparent, that the way to heaven, the nature and obligations of religion, were far different to what they had been represented as being by the Scribes and Pharisees. A superstitious faith ; a strict ceremonial, with base morality ; fashion ; luxury ; the cares of the world, the successes and disappointments of life, each and all tend to turn the heart from God, and to widen the path to destruction. With so much to increase natural corruption, and so little to favour holiness in the world, it cannot seem wonderful that the gate should be strait, and the way narrow, which conduct the soul to the kingdom of God. False and inefficient guides add to the difficulties which the world itself presents to us : common opinion is rife with error : the notion is entertained that God may be satisfied with professions ; the test of devout obedience is set aside ; exhibitions of zeal are preferred to the humble sacrifice of the heart and subjection of the will ; merit is claimed for things done rather for show, than for the interests of holiness ; and iniquity is concealed under the shining forms of a pompous activity, or noisy eloquence. In the great day of trial woeful will be the lot of those who have allowed themselves to be tempted in any of these ways to turn aside from the strait gate. So broad is the road which leads to destruction that it is trodden by men of every variety of temper, by men engaged in the most opposite pursuits, and of the most different tastes. The bold, the timid, the miser, the spendthrift ; the gross sensualist ; the most refined ornaments of society, all may be seen rushing headlong down the broad descent, agreeing alike in this, that if there be a way to life, it is too narrow for them. The warning with which our Lord concludes his discourse, is as tender as it is forcible. While it presents to us a

fearful picture in the destruction of those who hope to be saved by the Gospel to which they are not faithful, it exhibits under an image, the most beautiful and pathetic, the image of a home safe amidst the fiercest storms, the secure and tranquil state of every follower of Christ who obeys, as well as listens to, his word.

CHAPTER VIII.

VERSES 1—4.

As it does not appear that our Lord mingled the discourse, above reported, with any exhibition of his miraculous power, we may suppose that the poor, afflicted leper, was sufficiently impressed by the spiritual influence of his words, to believe that he could make him clean. If so, we have a very interesting illustration of the manner in which the faith created by the Gospel sends believers to Christ, as their all-sufficient friend in the season of calamity.

When on this occasion, as on others, our Lord forebad the object of his mercy to publish abroad what he had done; he is supposed to have wished to avoid unnecessary publicity. But this can scarcely be reconciled with the fact, that he had only a short time before wrought numerous miracles openly; and that he had now collected around him a vast multitude of hearers, ready to bear reports of his name to all parts of the country. The prohibition, therefore, had, it is likely, reference rather to the persons cured than to Jesus himself; and not so much to their personal safety, in regard to persecution, as to the state of their minds. They would probably feel inclined to go forth, and make a proud boast of the miracle wrought upon them. The best way to correct this, was to oblige them to a quiet, humble demeanour. It was a matter of legal duty that the cleansed leper should go to the priest; and having done what the law required, it was more

consistent with the duty of one, who had been the subject of divine compassion, that he should go home and pray, than that he should make himself the object of public curiosity. Our Lord intimated his will in a similar manner, when he prohibited the demoniac from following him, but instructed him to go to his friends, and tell them what had been done for him.

VERSES 5—13.

More than one trait of excellence may be seen in the centurion. His faith proves his susceptibility to truth : his anxiety for his servant affords sufficient indication of his kindness and benevolence ; the position which he held shews his fidelity and experience in his calling ; and his entire bearing towards our Lord gives equal witness to his combined humility and thoughtfulness. It does not at once appear why he should have spoken of himself as one under authority, and then as having himself the command of others ; but, according to the tenor of the narrative, he seems to have been anxious to shew why he did not wish the Lord to trouble himself to go to his house. It was one full of people ; a scene of business and confusion ; not a person there could be found ready, or at leisure, to listen to his discourse ; and venerating, as he did, the character of Jesus, he shrunk from the thought of seeing him enter his house with no one to own him as a Saviour. This was the sentiment of his humility. His faith spoke the language of unhesitating confidence. He felt that it was not necessary that Jesus should actually be present to cure his sick servant. He knew that the action of his power in this respect, was unlimited ; and that his word was sufficient to represent both his will and his omnipotence. But this was a faith not yet reached even by the choicest of the disciples, known as such. And hence the praise given by the Lord. A faith like that of the centurion, so firm and far-sighted, had

demoniac, compelled to flee their homes, had no better shelter than these rocky tombs. In the case of the unhappy being here mentioned, the wilder and the more solitary the retreat, the better it was suited to his despair. We understand little of the mode in which the great spirit of evil, or his ministers, can unite themselves with a human being, or with mere animal natures. But in Scripture narratives, the fact is enough for us to know. A horrible power may be exercised by Satan, or his angels, over both the body and the soul, whether of man or inferior creatures. This power Jesus can crush by a word, setting the sufferer free, in an instant, from the tyranny and the torture inflicted by the adversary. In the present case, there is a circumstance which cannot fail to excite the inquiry of a mind not content with the simply religious aspect of the subject. The passage of the devils into the herd of swine, in answer to their own desire, was unconnected with the actual cure of the demoniac. He was free the moment they left him. Was it in mercy to the devils, that they were permitted to enter the swine? May the prayer of devils even be heard? Did they wish to possess the swine in order to satisfy their own wrath? Did the Lord suffer them to do so, that they might become thereby the instruments of punishment to the wicked owners of the herds, and through them, generally, to the corrupt inhabitants of the coast? According to the prayer of the Gergesenes, the latter seems a probable supposition. They viewed Jesus as one endowed with authority to chastise them; and they besought him to leave their neighbourhood, not so much because they despised his doctrine, as because they dreaded his power.

CHAPTER IX.

VERSES 1—8.

Jesus, on returning to Capernaum, called his own city, because the general place of his abode, was immediately encountered by the two classes of people most interested in his proceedings. The one consisted of those who were suffering from some affliction ; the other of those who, either from hatred to him, always tracked his footsteps hoping to find occasion for his destruction, or who, not taking part with his worst enemies, were eager to learn more exactly the precise nature of his claims. This will account for his proceeding in the present case. He knew what was in the hearts of those around him. While, therefore, he pronounced his healing blessing on the poor paralytic, he couched it in words by which he asserted his Divine authority, and challenged the spies whose presence he so readily detected.

VERSES 9—13.

It is not without an important signification that our Lord called Matthew, and others of his apostles, while they were in the midst of their ordinary employments. He shewed thereby both his authority, and the wonderful nature of his grace and call. The apostles may have been well acquainted with his doctrines before they received the final summons to follow him ; but the moment chosen to prove the absolute force of his word was that in which every natural feeling, every consideration of worldly interest, stood most opposed to its influence ; and it was that in which the triumph was most open and palpable, and most likely, therefore, to produce a greater amount of good. The impression thus made by the call of Matthew, and his obedience to the

Divine summons, was apparently the cause of the anxiety of the multitude to be present at the feast which followed. To the same cause may be attributed the especial watchfulness of the Pharisees on this occasion. The answer which they received to their malicious question was derived from the two great sources of all just argument in matters of this kind—common sense and Scripture. According to the one, it must surely appear, that a moral teacher ought to be frequent in the company of those whose ignorance and depravity most need correction ; and, according to the other, it is no less evident, that it is the rule of the Creator to set a higher value on the dispositions which make men the instruments of his goodness, than on their attention to any ceremonial or formal service, even though it be of his own institution.

VERSES 14—17.

The disciples of John could as yet comprehend but imperfectly the distinction between the teaching of their master and that of Christ. The neglect of fasting must have appeared to them a strange violation of discipline, or disregard of venerable usages ; nor is it probable that any other answer but that which Christ himself gave, could have satisfied their doubts. His reply amounted to this. Fasting is proper to a state marked by circumstances sad or humiliating. But the followers of Christ, in so far as they were his followers, had, at that time, no occasion for mourning. They enjoyed his society : his converse supplied them with numberless motives to hope ; and his miracles convinced them that they had chosen well in adopting the cause of such a leader. While he was with them, they were as the friends of a bridegroom rejoicing in new prospects and new relationships. When the time should come for their ceasing to enjoy his visible presence, many circumstances would

arise tending both to sadden and to humble them, and then fasting might be useful, sometimes as expressive of their grief; sometimes as a ready and effective discipline. Our Lord, however, may have intended to convey only a general sentiment, referring not immediately to himself; but to the position of all persons, whether the disciples of John, or of any other teacher taken from among his people. The comparisons which follow gave a more direct answer to the inquiry on the subject. By the old garment, and the old bottles—(bottles made of skin)—former dispensations are intended. To have mixed up the Gospel with them, would have only hastened their decay. The Mosaic ordinances, and the mode of life adopted by John, and his disciples, were well fitted for the time; but they were intended only for a certain period; and it would have been to give a false view of their character, and to confuse the future converts to the Gospel, had Christ encouraged the notion, that the principles proper to the new system might be subjected to the practices of the old.

VERSES 18—34.

Our Lord wrought numerous miracles. The property which first strikes us in such works is power. This is common to all the miracles; but each has also its distinct character. Thus in the first of those here described, we are struck with the display of a mercy which, obedient to the pressing cry of parental distress, let not a minute be passed in questioning the petitioner: the call was for immediate relief, and it was immediately granted. But how beautiful was that, so to speak, parenthetical exercise of power and benignity, the cure of the poor trembling woman whose fear and humility veiled her faith! In both cases the action of Divine power was immediate, and the more wonderful as the more directly the result of heavenly compassion. The

cure of the blind men was suspended till they had made a confession of faith. This was doubtless for their own good. It impressed them with a feeling of greater awe. Had they been healed, at once, in answer to their clamorous cry, and in the street, the tumult of the moment might have greatly lessened the moral value of the miracle. The casting out of the devil was a different exercise of power; but attended by its peculiar circumstances. It was a blessing bestowed upon a suffering man, when that particular exercise of mercy was sure to bring upon Jesus the falsest and most cruel insults. "He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils." The answer with which he met such charges is stated in another place. He, perhaps, on this occasion, gave no other reply, but that which consisted in performing fresh acts of benevolence.

VERSES 35—38.

The summary account of our Lord's labours contained in the first of these verses, is a Gospel in miniature. In those which follow, we have a picture of the world as it presented itself to his gaze when, animated by the sublimest love and wisdom, he stood resolved to devote himself to its recovery from the power of darkness. But while his own blood only would suffice for an atonement, the mode by which the doctrine of salvation was to be made known, and applied to the delivery of mankind, required instruments and agents. And hence his exhortation to those who had already engaged themselves in his service. The labourers are few: pray that more may be raised up in proportion to the largeness and worth of the harvest to be reaped.

CHAPTER X.

VERSES 1—6.

The Apostles, before their designation to Christ's service by that peculiar and exalted title, were the most conspicuous among his followers. Hence they were known particularly as his twelve disciples. For the work which he set them, they required a power which he alone could give ; an authority, for that is the proper meaning of the word here translated power, over the evil spirits, which afflicted so many of those who would cry to them for help. By the ability which they also received to heal diseases, they prepared the way for convincing those who were willing to be convinced, that the Gospel was characterised by the profoundest mercy : that the most important practical benefits would follow in the train of its preachers ; and that it would prove the immediate antagonist of all the various kinds of evil which had come into the world through sin. That the Apostles, in the present instance, were to confine their labours to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, seems to have been rendered necessary, as well by the state of their own minds, as by the circumstances of the times. They were not yet sufficiently enlightened to be intrusted with the full liberty of evangelical teachers : their prejudices would have led them into numberless perplexities and disputes had they entered too soon into familiar intercourse with the heathen ; while the Samaritans would have been still less likely to receive them without some dangerous temptation to wrath or cavil.

VERSES 7—15.

Our Lord desired his Apostles to bestow liberally the grace which they had received : to exercise, that is, with a free and generous benevolence, the gifts bestowed upon them : but

endowed with this kind of wealth, and instructed thus to employ it, they were to depend for their own support upon the kindness of those among whom they ministered. Not gifted with a miraculous ability to determine who might be willing, or worthy to entertain them, they were, in this respect, to use the common means of information, and enquire on whose hospitality they might trust. Fearful was the sentence to be pronounced on those who should reject them, either as guests, or preachers. Thus jealous, from the first, was the Author of the Gospel, for the honour of those whom he really accredited as his ministers.

VERSES 16—25.

The former part of our Lord's address to his Apostles referred more immediately to the brief journey then before them. But having instructed them on this subject, he opened a far wider prospect to their contemplation. The time would come when they would traverse the whole Gentile world: when they would be brought before governors and kings for his sake; and when men of all classes, and of every relation in life, would find themselves put to a new test; their truthfulness, honour, public duty, and private affections, tried by a standard hitherto unknown. Intrusted with a system so powerful and divine, the ministers of Christ were not to imagine that any ability of their own would be sufficient for the fulfilment of the contemplated design. To guard them against such a notion, they were especially told to leave their defence to the season when it was required; to await the teaching of the Holy Spirit; and to ascribe to Him, when they had spoken eloquently and successfully, the happy result of their argument. Insult, contumely, in all its several forms, they were to expect. If Christ, the Son of God, was himself despised, what could his servants look for? But the resist-

ance of the world was to be the very source of all those circumstances by which their graces were to be proved ; and through which, in fact, their value was to be determined. If this be the case, who, as a Christian, can complain, when, in the world, he finds that his hopes are ridiculed ; his sentiments controverted : and the very Spirit of God, by which he is quickened, blasphemed as the spirit of evil ? Grievous, indeed, are such trials, but they are trials which his master bore.

VERSES 26—33.

No stronger argument can be urged against the fear of this world, or discontent at its reproaches and neglect, than the consideration, that all the falsehoods and misapprehensions to which an honest man may have been subjected, will at last be exposed to the clear light of truth. This is especially to be borne in mind, when the declaration of Christ's doctrines is concerned. The misconceptions which may follow our statements ; the vexations or distresses which may be the consequence of our zeal, cannot injure us substantially. God will bring the whole to a good issue. His servants are the particular objects of his care : and woe be to him, who, from the fear of present ill, shrinks from boldly acknowledging Christ. The merits of the Saviour shall not justify him who has denied the Saviour.

VERSES 34—42.

The object of Christ's coming was not to give peace to the world, according to the common notion of peace. He might, indeed, by an act of omnipotence, have compelled all parties to adopt the same religion ; he might have subdued all discord by increasing to excess the means of luxurious enjoyment, lapping all violent passions in sloth ; and taming inquiry into indifferentism ; but he could do nothing of this kind consistently with his great design. By converting the sinner he

made him the opponent of all who refused to be converted ; when he translated a man from the kingdom of darkness into that of light, he placed him in a position in which all the fiery darts of the wicked would be directed against him. The nearer the mere natural relationship, the more angry would be the attacks with which the enemies of Christ would assail those who left their circle to join his people, and labour in his name. In some cases, the convert would be called upon to make a distinct choice between the spiritual and the earthly object of his affection. Whenever this should happen, the words of Christ furnished the rule to which there could be no exception. The dearest natural tie must yield to the heavenly call, or every hope depending upon the Gospel is forfeited. But though a sacrifice like this may, at first sight, seem opposed to our deepest seated affections, it is not properly so. All real love has its source in God ; and certain we may be, that whatever sacrifices we make for his glory, nothing which is essentially good or precious to us, will eventually be lost thereby. This is true with life itself. If we keep it when he requires it of us, we actually lose it : if we surrender it, according to his will, we save it everlastinglly. All this is said to encourage the servants of Christ in a steady and fearless obedience to his Gospel ; and it is added, that they who honour those who are engaged in his service, shall be partakers with them of his blessing.

CHAPTER XI.

VERSES 1—6.

Considerable difficulty attends this account of the interview between our Lord and John's disciples. If the Baptist could, at any time, have been doubtful as to our Lord's divinity, or office, it is scarcely conceivable that he could be so at the very close of his ministry, and when all his hopes

must have rested on the knowledge that the Lord, whose way he was sent to prepare, had indeed come. But it is not difficult to suppose, that the disciples of John were still at a great distance from their master in faith and knowledge. Among the multitudes which were baptised with his baptism, there must have been men of very different mental character, some more and some less disposed to belief. So also must there have been many who, coming to John at a very early, or very late, period of his ministry, had not seen Christ. The disciples now sent to him belonged, no doubt, to a class which were wanting in some means of information enjoyed by the rest. Their inquiry was encouraged by John : but it was strictly theirs, not his. The answer, moreover, which they received was, apparently, far more adapted to the necessities of men of ordinary character, than to those of a man like the Baptist. Had he still felt doubts respecting the actual divinity of our Lord ; respecting his answering, that is, in every minute particular, to the prophetic delineation of Him whose name was to be "wonderful," the report of his disciples would scarcely have availed for the purpose. The only means by which such a mind, under such circumstances, would be satisfied, were those extraordinary influences and communications of the blessed spirit, which we cannot suppose would have been denied, in whatever degree necessary, to so faithful and holy a servant of God as the imprisoned Baptist.

VERSES 7—11.

The conversation with John's disciples gave occasion to a more particular notice of John himself. Our Lord alludes, in the first place, to the false notions which many had formed respecting his character. Some expected to see a man agitated by passion ; moved by a temporary enthusiasm ; dressed in the garb most fitted to inspire admiration, or

employing arts which might, if successful, exalt him to some wealthy dignity. Others, understanding better the nature of his office, went out to listen to him as a prophet; but even they did not comprehend fully the object of his mission: he was not only a prophet; but more than a prophet; he was the especial herald of the prince of peace. And yet, great as he was, he finished his course too soon to be admitted formally and actually into the kingdom of Heaven as established by the new covenant. The society of saints which constitutes that kingdom is founded in the blood of Christ; and lives by the grace of the Holy Ghost. Whatever, therefore, was to be the glory of this eminent servant of God, beyond the grave, in this world he was less than the least of those who are members of Christ: less than the humblest of those believers to whom the whole system of the Gospel has been imparted by the spirit.

VERSES 12—19.

The preaching of John had moved many repentant sinners to look eagerly for the promised deliverer. Some of them had already seen and heard him; and, in a lower sense of the words, the kingdom of Heaven was revealed to their desires. The pardon of sin, the renewal of their nature; the prospect of eternal happiness, would, they at once discovered, be the consequence of entering this kingdom. For such objects what would they not do? Neither doubts nor fears would restrain the attempt to gain them: and prayers; tears; and all the exercises of faith, rendered bold by the agonies of a new repentance, would help them to embrace the Gospel at all hazards, and to constitute themselves followers of Christ, notwithstanding all their past sins and present infirmities. Hence the kingdom of Heaven would suffer violence, it being taken possession of by those who had no legal claim to admission; no merits of their own to

plead; no innate power by which to gain it. The Jews were called the children of the kingdom, and, forgetting their countless violations of God's law, still supposed they had a right to the inheritance. Thus, our Lord now intimated the great truth, more fully exhibited when the Gospel was established, and when St. Paul expressed it by saying, that the Jews, being ignorant of God's righteousness, went about to establish their own righteousness. (Rom. x., 3.) Whereas the Gentiles, "which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith" (ix., 30). John brought to a close the prophecies of the Old Testament, whether conveyed by words, or by types and symbols. He came in the spirit of Elias, and was, in action and power, the antitype of the ancient prophet, an important fact for all who had ears to hear, inasmuch as they learnt hereby that the time of Messiah was really come; and that the day of redemption, the latter day of the patriarch Job, had dawned upon them. But forcibly as the voice of truth and mercy sounded in the ears of some, the multitude exhibited the saddest proofs of obstinacy and caprice. John's abstinence and severity displeased the very people who hated Christ for his gentleness and benignity. But wisdom, taking her own stedfast course, ever, that is, doing what is most consistent with the Divine will, and which may best tend to accomplish its designs, will be justified of her children both in respect to themselves, conscious of their rectitude; and in respect to their work, producing its expected fruits. Thus John was stern and rigid, in conformity with the preaching of repentance: Jesus partook of the entertainment ordinarily furnished him by his disciples, because his Gospel was to render men fit for Heaven without separating them from the common circumstances of social existence.

VERSES 20—24.

The advantages conferred on the places where Jesus personally taught were such, that nothing but the extreme of malice and perverseness could have destroyed their effect. It has been asked, if the ancient cities would have repented had they been allowed similar help, why did not God grant it? To the common answer, that all such things belong to his unsearchable counsels, it may be added, that, as in the case of Pharaoh, the season of grace being past, the cities mentioned could not be allowed the further call to repentance, even though they would have heard it. But the sin of Caphnaum was greater than theirs, inasmuch as it had reached a point, at which the grace, which would have wrought effectually in the worst among them, was utterly despised.

VERSES 25—30.

Our Lord thanked his Father that he did not reveal the mystery of the Gospel to the wise and prudent, but to the poor and simple, not because wisdom and prudence are unfit associates for the Gospel, but because, as mere natural qualities, or worldly endowments, they tend to pride, and make men self-sufficient, self-seeking, and tyrannous. Knowledge, though imparted from Heaven, would only render men, so disposed, still more arrogant; and it is a mercy to the church of Christ, that the doctrines upon which it rests are not communicated to haughty, petulant minds, to give them further occasion for boasting, but to those whose humility, gentleness, and charity, ever keep pace with their growing intelligence. Thus, our Lord, having briefly alluded to the mystery of his own nature, adds, that none can know him but the Father, or the Father but the Son, and that this wonderful knowledge is extended only to those whom the Son teaches, that is, the humble and meek, before alluded to. “Come unto me,”

therefore, is his gracious invitation to those who feel their imperfections and ignorance, with all the attendant errors to which they have led, as a grievous burden. He can give rest to the most oppressed: comfort to the most afflicted. Let them but learn of him to be meek and lowly; let them submit simply and unreservedly to the yoke of his Gospel, and while they shall find the yoke itself the lightest of all that can be imposed upon the soul, exercising it in obedience to God, so shall they enjoy peace and assurance, and an unfailing hope; the light burden of Christ being in all points contrasted with the crushing load of cares, terrors, and perplexities, which they had ever to sustain during their servitude to sin.

CHAPTER XII.

VERSES 1—8.

The act of the disciples seems to have been that of men, who, feeling faint and weary, carelessly plucked a few ears of corn to amuse themselves on the way, and with no thought whatever of toiling for a meal, or doing anything which could ever properly be regarded as a violation of the sabbath. Never was a more rancorous spirit displayed than that which marked the conduct of the Pharisees on this occasion; but it was met by calm and sedate argument. Holy as is the law of the sabbath, reasoned our Lord, it is not of such a nature that no possible exceptions can be made to its observance. According to the strict letter of the commandment, the very priests, by the work of the temple, break or profane the sabbath; but they are blameless, because the necessity of the case, and the intention with which they act, excuse them in the sight of God. Extreme want, the imminent peril with which he was threatened, justified David in an act, which, under ordinary circumstances, would have merited severe punishment. But, according to the reasoning of the Pharisees,

sacrifice must take the place of mercy: the letter rather than the spirit of the law must determine our judgments, and no exception is to be recognised in the interpretation of any legal precept. Our Lord shews that Scripture itself is against such views; but he adds, as if intending to set disputes of this kind at rest for ever: "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day." And, as the sabbath was created for man, so shall the Redeemer of the world shew to his disciples its real nature, and secure them the full enjoyment of the blessings it is intended to afford. By his Gospel and his Spirit he will subject men to the law of love, and they will then keep the sabbath with a really stricter, because with a more complete, more comprehensive, and devout obedience, than can ever be rendered by those who look at divine ordinances only in their outward, or literal description.

VERSES 9—13.

It is a happy circumstance for Christ's disciples that the doctrines of their master are fully supported by his practice. Thus, as he had plainly declared that the Pharisaic interpretation of work, as a violation of the sabbath, was strained and false, so he seized the first opportunity which presented itself, to shew that his own benevolence would never be limited by such a rule. The argument which he employed to justify his conduct was an appeal to common sense; the miracle which he performed was a demonstration of his divinity; but neither the one nor the other could move the hearts of men, whose offended vanity had more authority with them than either truth or charity.

VERSES 14—21.

The malice of the Pharisees, was, for some time, an undefined feeling of dislike; it gradually ripened into hatred; but was still uncertain as to its plans and object. We, now, for the

first time, hear of counsel being taken against Jesus; and from this point, we may trace the growth of the design which was then to be fulfilled, when the hour of darkness, the appointed agent, and the permissive will of the self-devoted Jesus, concurred in its accomplishment. Till that time the Redeemer carried on his work with untiring mercy; and it would appear, from the reference to Isaiah, that while his Gospel was to become the means of renovation, of light and salvation to the Gentiles, his own personal course of instruction was to be such, that no provocation to wrath or prejudice would be given to the Jews, except as they themselves created it by their obstinate and incurable wickedness.

VERSES 22—32.

Satan being allowed to exercise a certain degree of power over mankind, the mode in which he has employed it, in different ages, seems to have been determined by the character of the times, and the state of the people among whom he has worked. Thus, in a gross and sensual nation, where the moral feelings had long ceased to be the measure of good, his object would have been but half gained, his malice but little satisfied, had he been able to affect only the mind. When the disordered intellect was attended with bodily injuries or defects, his power became visible, and he could rejoice in the agonies of terror which his presence, sometimes actual, sometimes expected or imaginary, inspired. In the case here described, the casting out of the devil is especially spoken of as the healing of the sufferer, his bodily defects ceasing immediately on the departure of the evil spirit. When the people, in astonishment, asked “Is not this the son of David?” they meant, “Is not this, indeed, the expected Messiah? That wonderful son of his whom, though recognising him as his descendant, he still called Lord?” This was an inquiry, eminently calculated to irritate the Pharisees; and the answer

which they returned was evidently an expression of the blindest wrath. They appear, however, to have spoken on the subject only secretly among themselves, dreading, probably, to encounter, at that time, the common sense of the people, which would have been outraged by so gross a blasphemy. But Jesus knew that they would not fail to utter it as soon as they might find it safe to do so, and he, therefore, anticipated their slander by furnishing his simple, honest hearers, with an incontrovertible answer to their proposed lie. The miracle just wrought was too decided, too complete a defiance to the power of Satan, to be confounded with any deceptious shew of some mere emissary of the devil. It was at once evident, that Satan would never have allowed his authority to be so humbled in the sight of the multitude, by any of his own ministers. And hence the unanswerable argument of Jesus. But the argument is followed by a warning on the most awful of all subjects. Our Lord had referred to the Holy Spirit as the source of the power by which he had healed the demoniac. The divine nature of the operation could not, in this case, be mistaken for any other. It was palpable both to the senses and to the reason of the beholders, that a power in direct opposition to the power of Satan had been at work, and this power, it was equally evident, could be no other than that of God, or of his Spirit. To ascribe, therefore, such an act to an auxiliary of Satan, or to Satan himself, was direct blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. That a sin of this kind is unpardonable, results not simply from any positive decree, or sentence, of the Almighty, but from the very nature of things. The Holy Spirit brings the evidence of divine truth into immediate contact with the human soul, and its consciousness. When such evidence is despised, the offender becomes, by the very act, a reprobate: he rebels against a God who stands before him fully and clearly revealed; and, as no difference of place, time, or cir-

cumstance, can modify a sin like this, it matters not whether man or devil commits it: it cannot be forgiven either in this world or another. Two most important points remain to be considered: the one calculated to alarm; the other to allay anxiety. According to some popular, but very erroneous, views of the subject, the sin against the Holy Ghost, would be confined to one particular class of offences, and that, necessarily, a very narrow class, consisting, in fact, of those only which could be committed when our Lord was personally concerned. But this is to contradict the primary character of the sin given it by our Lord himself. He states expressly that any blasphemy regarding himself would be forgiven, while that against the Holy Ghost would not; thus separating, by the strongest of all distinctions, the one offence from the other. The sin against the Holy Ghost being, therefore, limited in no way to the visible presence of our Lord, may be committed as well in one age of the church as in another; and under any circumstances in which the blessed Spirit may mercifully exhibit his power in effectually combating the presence of Satan. But the operations of this almighty agent, in the diffusion of the Gospel, are unquestionably more extensive now than they were before the ascension of our Lord. They are not now confined, as they were originally, to occasional miracles; but are commensurate with the length and breadth of the entire church, which, whatever its degree of life or energy, has it only from Him. In many cases, doubtless, He exercises his power with grand and visible effect; in other instances less openly, but not less distinctly to the consciences of those whom he is pleased to visit; and in both these respects, to resist him by wicked subterfuges, is to follow the Pharisees in their blasphemy, and to encounter the same terrible condemnation.

But while it is a dangerous error to narrow the sphere in which the sin against the Holy Ghost may be committed, it

is no less contrary to the Gospel to give so wide an interpretation to the expression “it shall not be forgiven,” as it frequently receives. The sin against the Holy Ghost is, indeed, unpardonable by its very nature, as well as by its enormity. It is the direct antagonist of grace and truth, and implies the abandonment of the soul in wilful rebellion against God revealing himself. For such a sin, whether committed by man or angels; whether on earth or in heaven, there can be no forgiveness; it repels mercy, and therefore cannot be its subject. But though the sin be in itself unpardonable; and though the soul of him in whom it dwells be opposed to every work of divine grace, it ought not to be doubted, that the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse the sinner even in this case. Let but the Holy Ghost put forth his power, and subdue the rebel, blaspheming will, and what will the guilty wretch then become, but a poor penitent, only the more wretched because of the greatness of his offence, but certainly not hopeless, experiencing, as he has, the force of heavenly mercy in this softening of his heart. Thus, though we may not look for mercy in the case of those who are actually sinning against the Holy Ghost; while no plea of infirmity; no mention of ignorance, or calculated amount of temptation, will here avail; there is ample room to hope, that no terrible balance of power has been established in this one instance between the human soul and the Holy Spirit, but that the latter may yet subject the scorner to his will. Let him but, in mercy, accomplish this triumph, and will he fail to lead the penitent to Jesus, or will Jesus refuse to be the penitent’s Redeemer and Advocate?

VERSES 33—37.

To *make* has here the same meaning as to *regard*, and our Lord was referring immediately to the subject in question. Had he been animated by the evil spirit, to which the Phari-

sees attributed his works, his deeds, instead of being, as they were, so purely beneficent, would have been base like the power which inspired them. The Pharisees, themselves, on the contrary, proved the wickedness of their hearts by their evil dispositions; and that no doubt might exist as to the application of the remark to the present dispute, our Lord reminded them, that even their false and idle words would not be forgotten at the day of judgment.

VERSES 38—42.

A strong feeling had been excited in favour of our Lord. Some, even of the Scribes and Pharisees, began to regard him with surprise; and, in this state of mind, they would gladly have had their doubts resolved by the sight of some miracle, which, wrought by Jesus, must compel the assent of every beholder to the rightfulness of his pretensions. But the wish for such a sign, was, in itself, a proof that they were unwilling to receive the truth according to the teaching of divine wisdom. Their hearts were hard; their minds perverse and rude; and had conviction been forced upon them in that state, the intellectual faculties would have been satisfied at the expense of the moral, and the latter would have become more dormant than ever. As well, therefore, in mercy as in judgment; no less as a wise physician than as a rigid economist, did our Lord refuse them any sign but that of his own resurrection, the evidence of which would be amply sufficient to try the honesty of their wish to be convinced, or to prove the wilful blindness of their understanding. The men of Nineveh exhibited a striking contrast to those who thus disputed the truth of Jesus. They repented when there was little more than the earnestness of the prophet to move them; or, supposing that Jonas acquainted them with his singular history, when there was but one sign to accredit him as the messenger of heaven. Jesus, on the contrary, had already

wrought many miracles, and was preparing to accomplish still greater wonders. The wisdom of Solomon had brought the Queen of Sheba from her distant country to hear his lessons; but what could Solomon reveal in comparison with the truths which Jesus every day taught the humblest of his followers?

VERSES 43—45.

Our Lord would not allow the Scribes and Pharisees to escape till he had inflicted upon them the full measure of their deserved chastisement. The unclean spirit was the power which led them originally into the common vices, follies, and prejudices of their age. This, the base and vulgar spirit of licentiousness, they contrived to expel by the stern discipline to which their system taught them to submit. Hence, they became legally moral and exact in their outward conduct, and were inwardly free from the grosser defilements of passion. But they had not learnt to hate evil for itself; nor had they made their hearts the temple of the Holy Ghost. When the unclean spirit, therefore, returned to contemplate his former habitation, though he found it clean and garnished, purified, that is, from his defilements, and furnished with many showy ornaments of virtue, he saw at once, that it might, with due effort, be regained. Some glimpse is given us of the state of unclean spirits by this incidental mention of their wandering in dry places, and finding no rest when driven from the objects of which they held possession. The dry places mean, probably, nothing more than the uninhabited desert; but their restless misery in such solitudes, seems to intimate that they suffer less torment when embodied in some animated frame, and, hence, we have a repetition of the idea suggested by the account of the demoniac, when the legion of evil spirits desired to take possession of the herd of swine. But a more awful lesson cannot be given than that which our Saviour here

teaches. A man, who is freed from the ordinary corruptions of the world, but is not sanctified by the abiding presence of the Holy Ghost, will be surprised by the return of his old sins in some hour of unlooked for weakness. Nor will he merely thus become again a known sinner ; he will find himself under the power of seven evil spirits, each mightier than the one to which alone he was originally subjected. The experience of individuals, and of whole classes of men as well as individuals, bears testimony to the truth on which this warning is founded. Let those who hear it, and who may hitherto have contented themselves with a partial, or superficial morality, or who may have repented of single sins, without looking to the root of all sin, tremble at the insecurity of their position; let them not rest, till they have good reason to believe that no evil spirit can shake the foundation of their faith, or expel any of the graces which have pre-occupied their hearts.

VERSES 46—50.

Our Lord's answer to the announcement, that his mother and brethren^{were} were desiring to speak with him, did not imply any want of affection for them, but the comprehensiveness of his love, and its intensity in regard to those who were properly his disciples. It is not impossible, however, that at that juncture his natural relations might be under some error concerning him, and that he intended to rebuke them, contrasting their coldness and want of faith, and consequent alienation from him, with the fervent devotion of many of his followers, whose truthful hearts were altogether at one with his.

CHAPTER XIII.

VERSES 1—17.

As the earnestness or curiosity of the multitude increased, so did our Lord manifest his readiness to meet every claim upon his mercy, and his care to avail himself of every opportunity thus afforded for the instruction of the assembled crowds. He assigns two reasons for his speaking in parables: the one derived from the ignorance of the people: the other from the capacity of his disciples. Opposed as these reasons for his adopting such a mode of instruction seem to be, they are, in reality, alike demonstrative of his wisdom and humanity. The parable was, of all species of discourse, the most fitted to excite the attention of rude and slothful hearers. If they could be aroused by any kind of address, they would be induced to listen to a representation of circumstances and characters eminently calculated to awaken their imagination or sympathy. If, when thus aroused, they chose to exercise even some slight degree of thought, they could not fail to discover the general scope of the lesson which the story was intended to convey. In such a case, our Lord would have accomplished his purpose as a teacher; and the first step would have been taken by the hearer from the circle of the multitude towards that of Christ's true disciples. Where, on the other hand, a base ignorance was still preferred to the offered light, the parable was too unobtrusive to force consent; and, which was very important, it presented the truth in such a form that, however, when discovered, it might provoke the Scribes and Pharisees, it could not be gainsaid by any sophistry, or made the foundation of any attack upon our Lord in the way of legal accusation. In regard to his disciples, the parable was pre-eminently

adapted to their then state of mind and feelings. They were, as yet, too far from a spiritual faith, not to need common helps and excitements to thought. From truth, in its simplest forms, they might have turned, either startled or uninterested. But still their condition was one which justified their master in imparting to them the most essential elements of Divine knowledge; and in gradually enticing them to study the comprehensive outline of the system, of which they were themselves to be the stewards and administrators. Their very inquiry respecting the meaning of the parables told them, affords an interesting proof of the growing intelligence of these scholars of Christ; and the declaration which he made, that many prophets and righteous men had desired to see the things which they now saw, shews no less clearly that there were wonderful truths embodied in his parables; doctrines, that is, of a much higher kind than those which pertain to a mere elementary religion.

VERSES 18—23.

The very first subject which should occupy the mind of a reader, with this lesson before him, is the state of his own heart. In hearing the word of God, we are in one, or the other, of the conditions represented by the parable. The ground which is to receive the seed is either prepared for it or not. We are about to listen to Divine truth by accident, or of set purpose. Our minds will retain it when heard, or they will forget it, as a thing of too little immediate worth to be retained. They will allow it to work upon them by sudden excitement, and admire its effects for the moment; but let the first care, or the first temptation to pleasure, destroy them. Knowing that this will be the case, we must carefully examine ourselves, whenever we are about either to hear, or to read the word of God. We may then prepare our hearts and minds to receive it, so that they may bring

forth fruit abundantly. If Divine grace already quickens and sanctifies the living soil, happy are we : let us pray the great husbandman to pour in more and more seed, that the harvest may be the more glorious. If we see reason to fear that either the shallowness or the hardness of our hearts ; that the anxieties of life, or our love of pleasure, may prove an obstacle to the growth of the good seed, then let us pray, that the blessed Spirit may be sent to our aid, and that, by his warm, cheering grace, we may convert the otherwise barren ground into a fit receptacle for the heavenly deposit.

VERSES 24—43.

The parables which follow, directed the minds of the disciples to two of the most remarkable features in the kingdom about to be established by the Gospel. In the first place, it was not, externally, to be free from the accidents of the world ; it was to be exposed to its violences ; its corruptions ; and deteriorating influence. The enemy of salvation was not to be prevented by force from assailing its members, or from exercising his arts within its borders. Warned beforehand of the danger, the servants of Christ were to exercise all the graces which serve to constitute or strengthen prudence, fortitude, and self-denial, and, at the same time, to wait with perfect resignation for the appointed season when their actual separation from the wicked will leave the children of God to the uninterrupted enjoyment of his blessing. In the next place, and as another feature to be looked for in the kingdom of Heaven, it is to overspread the whole earth. And this remarkable characteristic of the energy of the Gospel, will affect the mind of an inquirer, in proportion to his knowledge of the power of prejudice, of human passion, good or evil, of national customs, political institutions, and every other medium through which a limiting selfishness can act. As he is acquainted with the

tendency of such things to resist the principles by which a wise and loving Creator works, so will he admire that system which is gradually pervading the whole world; imbuing every division and form of society with some portion of its own life, and offering to mankind at large an opening to the grandest attainments of truth and wisdom. The precepts, doctrines, and spirit of the Gospel, are the leaven which, from the days of Christ's first triumph up to the present hour, stirs the otherwise torpid masses of the world. Good and bad have been admitted into the kingdom of Heaven, as it exists on earth. The time will come, when the actual effects of the leaven will be tried: when the truth of every disciple will be put to the test. Were the separation to take place under present circumstances, the complicated interests of society would be utterly ruined. A wicked father, suddenly taken away, would leave innocent children to perish, or, as good wheat, they would be plucked up untimely with the tares. So in the countless other relations of life; and hence God, in his great compassion, bears with the contradiction of his rebel creatures, lest in punishing them with immediate destruction, He should overwhelm those whom he desires to bless.

VERSES 44—58.

The parable of the net cast into the sea, answers to that of the wheat and the tares in one particular, that is, they both shew of what various classes the kingdom of Heaven, outwardly considered, is composed. They differ, however, in this respect: the former not only tells us what may be expected from the malice of Satan, but shews it as the operating cause of the phenomena of the Christian Church, so vexed and deformed by corruption: the latter parable simply exhibits results: good and bad are found in the nets of the fishermen: here it is not told us how the mixture

came : the separation is made, but it is without reference to the origin of the evil thus detected as mingled with the good. The other parables, are addressed to us rather in our individual capacity, than in that of our condition or prospects as members of the Church. As a good of inestimable worth, but never obvious to mere natural reason, the Gospel is like a hidden treasure : in respect to its beauty, singularity and value, it is like a pearl, the possession of which may be coveted as the most profitable, as well as the most costly merchandize. He who gives up all, but gains, for what he resigns, this treasure or this pearl, will never repent of the exchange.

Our Lord's teaching ought ever to be held as the pattern to be followed by the preachers of his Gospel. The stores of human experience, whatever learning or observation can bestow, form part of the supply out of which they are to draw the materials of their discourse. But it forms only a part. Something new must be supplied ; and this is to be drawn from meditation : from the study of their own hearts ; the steady investigation of moral principles, as they see them working in the passions or motives by which they are themselves influenced.

Profound astonishment was naturally created by the power with which our Lord spake ; but instinctive admiration for wisdom or genius rarely counterbalances the prejudice attendant upon a humble condition of life, or early familiarity. In the case of our Lord, great was the loss suffered by those, who scornfully or doubtingly asked, "Is not this the carpenter's son ?" He then intimated the grand rule by which he has, from the beginning up till now, measured the employment and exhibition of his power among those to whom He offers his Gospel,—as is their faith, so shall be the experience of his grace.

CHAPTER XIV.

VERSES 1—5.

The Herod who forms so conspicuous a character in this part of the evangelical history, was the son of Herod the Great, and received, as his portion of the kingdom left by his father, the tetrarchy of Galilee and Perea. His lawful, but neglected wife, was the daughter of Aretas, King of Arabia, who would have successfully avenged her quarrel, but for the interference of the Romans. Yielding, however, to the ambition of Herodias, he sought the title of king, an honour bestowed upon his nephew, Herod Agrippa, tetrarch of Abilene. His appearance at Rome was the signal for his enemies to employ their influence for his ruin. They succeeded; and instead of his obtaining the hoped for title, he was deposed, and sent into banishment; his passion for Herodias thus proving the occasion of his downfall; a circumstance, the moral of which did not escape the notice of Josephus, who says, “And thus did God punish Herodias for her envy at her brother, and Herod also for giving ear to the vain discourses of a woman.” The conduct of John, in this case, indicates not only the boldness and energy of his spirit, but the greatness of his designs. He reproved vice, not in the low and vulgar only, but, as it appeared among the princes of the land. His life, it is probable, could not have been sacrificed at a better price, or for a purpose more profitable to the Gospel, than that for which it was now laid down. Retaining, to the end, the severe characteristic of his mission, he asserted the awful, unalterable, and irrespective nature of the divine law. A prince had violated it; and he was to be warned and reproved in the same language as that addressed to the humblest of his people. The ministers of God, under any dispensation, receive both a lesson and an encouragement

of the highest worth from this incident. They are taught to speak the truth without respect to persons ; and they may see, that a pure and honest course, though it cost them their lives, is attended with the most sublime rewards ; that humiliating fear, on the part of the wicked, however high their rank, and love and reverence, on the side of the good, will bear indisputable testimony to the worth of their labours, and prove them to belong to the family and soldiers of God.

VERSES 6—12.

The conduct of Herod was as base as it was cruel, but was precisely that which men of his character commonly pursue. He had sufficient ability both to understand the worth of John's teaching, and to perceive the danger of exciting the indignation of a people just awakening into moral consciousness at the voice of such an instructor. The feeling with which he was thus impressed, would, probably, have prevented him from taking any severe measures against the Baptist; would have subdued the indignation, however great it might be, which he felt when reproved for his own offences against the law. Even when compelled by the angry solicitations of Herodias to imprison John, he was as unwilling as ever to inflict any greater penalty upon him ; nor does it appear that any arguments would have induced him to commit a deed so opposed to policy and common justice as the murder of this holy man, had not his judgment been taken by surprise. But this is continually the case with those who occupy high stations, and are wanting in the graces of God's Spirit. Reason, experience, some natural notion of justice, preserve them, in an ordinary state of mind, from perpetrating flagrant offences against the common duties of their position. But suddenly exposed to excitement, their faculties become confused ; right and wrong appear with equal pretensions, and passion is summoned to decide the cause. The unhappy

prince, in this case, looked with horror at perjury, involving, as it here did, the additional evil of an inhospitable insult ; he shrank with greater dread from the crime of murder ; and a man, in his right senses, would not have doubted which of the two sins might soonest have been expiated, supposing that one or the other must necessarily be committed. But the baser feelings of his heart quickly determined the controversy ; and he committed the crime, which, eventually, cost him his liberty, and his crown.

VERSES 13—21.

More than one motive may have induced our Lord to retire into solitude on receiving the news of John's execution. According to his general rule, he would not, before the appointed time, lay himself open to the assaults of his enemies, and he well knew that the state of Herod's mind, darkened and infuriated by the sense of guilt, was that in which, according to the law of a corrupt nature, he was more likely to pursue than cease from crime. But while his unwillingness to provoke attack would induce our Lord to avoid the present wrath of Herod, the tenderness of his soul, strongly excited by the loss of so dear a friend as John the Baptist, would still more powerfully incline him to seek, for awhile, quiet and retirement. In the wilderness, or among the mountains, he could enjoy uninterrupted communion with his Father : he would be free to meditate on the progress of the grand design, to which the labours of John, now completed, formed the introduction ; his heart, yielding to its sublimest impulses, might feel that his martyred friend and forerunner was near him now in a higher form of being ; and that but a brief period was now to be passed before he would himself rise, in his perfected and glorified humanity, to rejoice with him, and his other faithful servants, in the fruit of their labours. But here, as in all other cases,

Jesus manifested his self-denial. His solitude was quickly invaded; and he as quickly yielded to the necessities of those who sought him. He instructed them in the way of salvation; he healed their sick; and he fed them: exhibiting in this compendium of power and mercy the grandest features of his office. In none of his miracles did he afford a more explicit proof of his creative power; or of his right to be worshipped as the Son of God, the Word, by whom He made the worlds. The bread which he held in his hands, which he blessed and brake, was used by him either substantially and only as far as it went, and being consumed was followed by the fruit of creation; or it was used as the substratum of the miracle, and thus existed throughout the entire distribution to the multitude. The latter appears the more probable conjecture. It answers nearly to the multiplication of bread from the seed sown; and while the miracle, thus viewed, is no less a demonstration of Divine power, it does not present it in the startling light of an isolated act of creation; an exercise of almighty energy, which, as far as we read, seems to have been confined to the original of worlds, and their systems. But whichever notion we adopt, the power and benevolence of Jesus are equally manifest, the very existence of so large a mass of fragments, after all had been fed, being calculated to inspire us with a peculiar feeling of the riches of his bounty.

VERSES 22—33.

Having sacrificed his immediate repose to the urgent cry of the multitudes that followed him, Jesus patiently awaited the silent hours of night. They came, and, doubtless, brought with them manifold consolations to his wearied spirit. There was nought now to interrupt his full and free communion with Heaven. In hours like these, he could gain all those helps which his humanity required, and repair, at the foun-

tains of Divine grace, the injuries which it had endured in the rude and angry world. Prayer, in his case, was simple converse with God : and this it is, in the case of believers, in proportion to their spiritual likeness to Him. The proper result of such prayer is an immediate increase of the energies of the inward life ; and the advantage of prayer above all the other means of grace is, that it is so direct in its application, requiring no medium, wanting no instrument, but taking the soul at once into the presence of its Saviour, and making the Saviour himself its means of life, wisdom, and consolation.

Perilous was the state of the disciples when separated from their master. Often, no doubt, had they deplored his absence as they trembled for the safety of their ship : often had they stretched their eyes towards the misty hills to discover whether he was taking any notice of their danger. As the morning began to break, they could discern the dim outline of a form moving on the surface of the waves. It seemed now as if their wishes were about to be fulfilled ; but fear and doubt took the place of hope ; and nothing but the voice of Jesus himself could have assured them that relief was really at hand. So it must ever be. In the hour of anxiety or suffering we sigh for help. Perhaps we pray and hope ; and then indications of mercy are granted us ; but however plain they may be, if we judge of them only by our own understanding, they are speedily obscured by doubt ; we mingle them with our dreams and fancies, and end with ascribing them altogether to imagination. But if we still keep our souls in the attitude of prayer ; if we let nothing disturb our trust in the mercy of Jesus, then we shall soon hear his voice, and we shall find that the faint outline of a form which we saw in the distance, was really and truly the Lord coming to our help. A sudden revulsion of feeling will follow this discovery. We shall believe our faith to be

capable of anything. It was so with Peter. But he erred as to the degree of strength to which his faith had attained. He was mercifully taught to see his error. Let us be taught by his example; taught to trust ourselves even to the waves if so we can soonest win Christ; but warned by his example not to doubt Christ when he has called us to him.

The evidence afforded of our Lord's divinity by the sudden silencing of the tempest, as well as by his walking on the sea, was too striking for simple souls to question. In this simplicity was true wisdom. Unhappy the men whose habits of mind dispose them to question still, when God has already answered them.

VERSES 34—36.

Gennesareth was a town at the western extremity of the lake; and the people of the neighbourhood were amply rewarded for the ready faith with which they received our Lord. How strange it is, that any class, or portion of mankind, should ever hear of the presence of Christ, and not at once appeal to him for his help and blessing!

C H A P T E R XV.

VERSES 1—9.

The obedience which Jesus rendered to the law was complete and unreserved. While the great commandments of moral obligation governed him in thought, word, and action, there was no tittle of the ceremonial law disregarded in his course. But while he thus surrendered himself in holy submission to the law of God, he sternly and perseveringly refused to acknowledge the authority of human rules and tradition, ambitiously intended to subvert the simpler precepts of Divine truth. This could not be unobserved by those whose power

and dignity entirely depended upon their keeping up a system under the veil of which pride, superstition, and avarice, were alike able to carry on their respective purposes. It is well worthy of observation, that in their argument with our Lord, the Scribes and Pharisees very cunningly avoided any allusion to the principles by which they virtually annulled the law of God. They spoke to him only of what seemed a very harmless set of observances, and such as might easily be made to appear as well fitted to teach the necessity of a cautious purity. But Jesus dragged them into the light. Instead of allowing them to talk only of their trifling superstitions, he compelled them to look upon their daring and hideous mutilations of the law; their blasphemous glosses upon the plainest of duties, and the simplest of truths. The instance which he employed was well fitted to characterize the whole spirit of their system. God's law and natural affection alike point out the duty which children owe to their parents. Now what was the accommodating principle introduced by the rule of tradition? If a child wishes not to be burdened by the claims of his distressed or aged parents, let him make an offering of whatever he has to God; he will then be able to answer their troublesome appeals with the reply, that his property has been made a gift to heaven, and can no longer be employed to satisfy natural affection. Evasions, without number, were available to set aside the vow as soon as the danger was passed; and thus, indeed, as our Lord said, was the commandment of God made of none effect by their tradition. The worship which men render him when they despise his law, or weaken its authority by their inventions, can never be otherwise than an offence to a righteous and holy God.

VERSES 10—20.

Having exposed the grosser evils attending the system of

his opponents, our Lord reverts to the original subject of their discourse. The dependence placed upon outward purifications, and other such observances, is always attended with the danger of leading men's thoughts from the actual purification of the heart. Constituted as the human mind is, the sign which is felt and seen is, in all circumstances, a dangerous rival of the invisible grace, or spiritual truth, which can only be apprehended by a strong effort of faith. So, too, with regard to that which defiles. The unclean food, or the polluted garment, at once disgusts, as incompatible with the nice purity to be aimed at by the worshipper of God. But this delicacy has been often found to consist with the most real impurity of heart, the true condition of which is proved beyond dispute by the vices which it exhibits in almost every action of life. Terrible would be the prospects of mankind were there no hope of deliverance from the domination of error and superstition: but the blind leaders, with the blind who are content to be led by such guides, are destined to fall together; and every plant not planted by God, shall be rooted up.

VERSES 21—28.

The part of the country designated as the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, was Phœnicia, or Syro-Phœnicia, so called, because a part of the province of Syria. It was also still remembered as Canaan, the descendants of the ancient inhabitants being not yet exterminated, as in the other parts of the country. The faith and humility of the poor woman who appealed to our Lord's compassion, were fruits of Divine grace: mere anxiety for her daughter would not have brought her from her home: other mothers had sick daughters, but they did not seek him. Natural feeling would not have prompted the humble reply which she rendered to the seemingly repulsive harshness of his words: it would not have enabled her to

trust undoubtingly to his tenderness and mercy, when his answer to her cry had the appearance of stern rebuke. Preparatory grace did this for her; and its due employment was followed by the accomplishment of her wish. And this is a great lesson for us. Let us look for the grace which gives us the inclination and the resolution to seek Christ. If we have this, we may take good courage: it is but to obey its teaching; to be meek and patient, and then to go to Christ, and all shall be accomplished for us that our hearts can desire.

VERSES 29—31.

This is one of several passages which, by the very generality of the expressions employed, give us the most enlarged views of the power exercised by our Lord. Certain miracles are described with striking particularity. This is to afford us a distinct view of the action performed; of the simple omnipotence with which the Divine word effected its purpose, sometimes in one set of circumstances, sometimes in another. But the great lesson to be impressed upon the mind is this: the power of Christ had no limit to its action but that which He chose to put upon it himself. Hence, on particular occasions, the number of miracles was so great, that it defied the ability of his disciples to speak of them distinctly. Crowds of sufferers lay prostrate before Him: He uttered words of comfort; lifted up his hand in sign of blessing, and the whole superincumbent weight of misery and agony passed away, and left the astonished objects of his mercy free from all their infirmities.

VERSES 32—39.

We are not informed how long a period intervened between the miraculous feeding of the multitude, as recorded in the last chapter, and that described in the present passage. It may be considered strange, that whatever time had passed

away, any of his disciples, after what had already occurred, should ask with a feeling of doubt, whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude? We are not, however, told who these disciples were. They may have been some only lately converted, and but lightly, if at all, acquainted with the previous miracle. Or the question may have been put not in the way of doubt; but, as such questions often are, with a feeling of implied triumph. The difficulty was suggested only to make the answer on the point of being given more glorious and amazing. "We know, O master, from the former instance of thy wonderful power and mercy, how soon thou canst supply the need even of this multitude in the wilderness." It was thus, probably, the disciples reasoned when they questioned their Lord, and the reply which he gave afforded a blessed confirmation to their faith. That this miracle ought not to be confounded with the former is evident from our Lord's own reference to the two, as seen in the following chapter. It may also be considered as an especial instance of mercy to his people, that so peculiar and stupendous an exhibition of his power was not confined to a single miracle.

CHAPTER XVI.

VERSES 1—4.

The increasing reverence shewn to Jesus provoked more and more the fears and jealousy of his enemies. They still, however, entertained the hope of either entangling him in his talk, or of involving him in some difficulty which might lessen the respect entertained for him by the people. Hence they desired of him a sign; some conspicuous exhibition of power, which he might not be able to afford, or which, if given, might allow them the opportunity of charging him with some species of diabolic deception. Avoiding the lure,

but making use of the occasion to teach a severe lesson, he reminded these sophists, that the same natural intelligence which enabled them, by observing the common changes of the sky, to foretell the calm or the storm, would be sufficient, if properly employed, to enable them to discover the approaching events prepared by the providence of God. One sign, however, they might expect to have. It was the sign of the prophet Jonas. This sign would be the grandest which the nations of the world had ever yet received. The son of man should be three days in the bowels of the earth: on the third he should rise; and as Jonas preached to the Ninevites, so should repentance and remission of sins be preached, in his name, round the whole compass of the earth.

VERSES 5—12.

The disciples were yet far from placing implicit trust in the power and benevolence of their master. His early lesson, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," had made but an imperfect impression on their minds; and even his late miracles, wrought no doubt with the especial intention of giving confidence to his people in all ages as to the watchfulness of God for their temporal support, were already almost forgotten. Our Lord knew well what was passing in their minds. His admonition brought it out more clearly; and he had then the opportunity of reproofing them for their want of faith, and inculcating a most important lesson on the duty of keeping the heart free from the leaven of malice and hypocrisy, and the complicated errors of which they are the source.

VERSES 13—20.

Cæsarea Philippi stood at the foot of one of the branches of Lebanon. It was formerly called Banias; and received the name of Philippi from Philip the Tetrarch, by whom it

was almost rebuilt; and Cæsarea in honour of Tiberius Cæsar. It was distant nearly 120 miles from Jerusalem, and must not be confounded with the Cæsarea, so famous in Evangelical history, and sometimes designated Cæsarea of Palestine. Our Lord's present discourse with his disciples was on a loftier theme than any which he appears as yet to have introduced to their attention. He wished to hear, from their own lips, what opinion they had formed of his nature and office. For this purpose, he brought to review the various accounts given of him in the world. Thus it was found that some persons, like Herod, believed that he was John the Baptist risen from the dead; others, with more show of reason, thought that he was Elijah, who had been promised as the forerunner of Messiah. This great man many might be ready to account him, though far from being inclined to believe that the Messiah himself could come in such a form, and with so little display of outward glory; others had adopted a popular notion that Jeremiah was either not dead, or would be restored to the world to execute some high prophetic mission; and they were not unwilling to believe that this imagination was now about to be realized. But none of these people had enjoyed the privilege of near intercourse with Jesus, and there was a peculiar emphasis in his words, when he looked at his disciples; and said, "But whom do ye say that I am?" The ready answer of Peter ought not to be taken, as it usually is, as indicative of his vast superiority in faith or intelligence, to the rest of the disciples. It was the answer of one who feared to be anticipated by others: he knew that what was passing in his mind occupied the thoughts of his brother disciples. Somewhat in advance of them he might be; the truth which inspired him had taken a more definite form in his thoughts; he had been favoured with a larger portion of grace: but his very impatience to speak first shewed that he was well aware

that if he did not speak at once there were many who wanted only a few moments' preparation to honour the Lord with the same confession. The belief expressed by Peter consisted, first, in the acknowledgment of Jesus as the Christ, or Messiah; and this embraced the whole circle of types and prophecies, as fulfilled in Him. But had it stopped here, though complete, as far as the Old Testament was concerned, it would not have shewn Him in his higher character, as prepared to be the author and finisher of a new covenant. The Son of God, alone, could be the Saviour of the world; and in confessing Jesus in this character, Peter passed beyond the farthest limit of the ordinary faith of a Messiah, and entered upon the domain of the Gospel. The answer which our Lord gave to Peter was, doubtless, intended, in the one case, to encourage the Apostle in a firm adherence to this Divine truth; it might be safely accepted by him as an especial blessing, proper to him whose lips had first proclaimed so sublime a faith: but when we look at the general scope of that which followed, there can be as little doubt, that the intention of our Lord was to mark the value of the great truth which had just been proclaimed, and to indicate, that upon that truth, through the medium of whoever might teach it, He would for ever establish his Church. As, however, the Church was thus to be founded, so necessarily it must be left to those who should unreservedly embrace, and plainly proclaim, the truth, to admit to membership, with that Church, or to exclude the unworthy from its communion. The charge which our Lord gave to his Apostles, that they should tell no man that He was Jesus the Christ, was either because they were not yet fitted to make known this truth, in a proper manner, or because there were but few, as yet, prepared to receive it, or worthy to enjoy the high privilege of such a communication.

VERSES 21—23.

An important lesson is taught by the incident here recorded. Peter was in a frame of mind which enabled him to comprehend the highest species of doctrinal truth; but he could not receive the sublime moral truth which was to form the basis of the Gospel as a means of salvation. Thus, it is evident, that it requires a larger measure of grace; a higher degree of spirituality, to enable us to own, and to rejoice in “Christ Jesus, and him crucified,” than to confess him only as the Son of God. Peter believed in his divinity; believed that he was come to be the Saviour of his people; but not as a Redeemer, whose own sufferings and blood must be the means of atonement. In so far as the temper of his mind was opposed to this view of salvation, he was the adversary of Christ; and, “Get thee behind me Satan,” was not too strong a rebuke for such an antagonist.

VERSES 24—28.

There is an immediate connection between our Lord's reproof of Peter, and the lesson which follows. Not only must the disciples of Christ learn to contemplate their master in his humiliation and sufferings; but they must bear the cross themselves. The former exercise of faith is the surest help to the latter. He, who really loves, and rejoices in, a crucified Redeemer, will not be unapt at taking up the cross himself; but certain it must be, from the very nature of things, that he, who rejects, or despises the cross, cannot be a true disciple of Christ. Let him sacrifice his life for his master, and with his master he shall triumph over death, and every enemy: but let him refuse this offering, and the life which he saves, must perish with the condemned and perishing world. Did he gain then this world itself, while he forfeited the hope of eternal life, what would be his profit? He would

perish in acquiring that which is itself perishable : a double folly : a double loss. Whereas, safe with Christ, he, who has surrendered all to him, may confidently look for the glory about to be revealed, as that in which he, himself, shall have an everlasting inheritance. The allusion which our Lord here makes to his coming in his kingdom, may refer either to his second advent, or to some of the intermediate manifestations of his power ; as when multitudes were converted by his word ; or when the reprobate Jews fell beneath his avenging sword. In the former case, our Lord may have meant, that among those who were then listening to him, there were such true and faithful believers, that they should not die till they beheld his glory ; or, according to a common idiom of language, that, free from death, they should behold the full triumphs of his kingdom. In the latter case, he may have pointed to John, and some few other disciples, whose lives upon earth were protracted till the Gospel was established in the fairest parts of the world, and Jerusalem had been shaken to its foundations.

C H A P T E R XVII.

VERSES 1—9.

There is probably an error in the common notion, that the wonderful occurrence which the three favoured Apostles were now called to witness, was mainly intended for their benefit. That it was, in part, to establish and elevate their faith, may readily be allowed ; but there is strong reason to believe, that the support of the blessed Jesus himself was the chief design of this great event. Viewed in this respect, it is one of the series of divine demonstrations, beginning with the opening of the heavens at his baptism, and ending with the appearance of the angel in Gethsemane “strengthening

Him." To all the feelings and apprehensions of our Lord's humanity, the glory with which he found himself invested; the glory which hung over him; the appearance from Heaven of the two greatest of God's earthly servants, coming with, not leaving, their glory, to converse with him,—and then the voice of his Father,—all this must have been to him a source of ecstatic joy, well fitted, as it was intended by the love and wisdom of his Father, to support him against the season of trial upon which he was so soon to enter. This being the main purpose of the transfiguration, it was not a proper subject for conversation in the mixed crowds, which were as yet but barely prepared to receive the simplest facts and doctrines connected with the Gospel. Now that that Gospel is fully known, how safely and joyfully may we proclaim the glory of our Lord!

VERSES 10—13.

The Apostles could no longer resist the calm and assured way in which our Lord spoke of his death. To this change of mind the words which they had heard from Moses and Elias on the Mount may have greatly contributed. But one remarkable difficulty remained to their full understanding of the mystery. If Jesus was indeed about to accomplish the great work foretold by the prophets, how was it that Elijah had not come, an event which was to be expected as certainly as the appearance of Messiah himself? Elias shall come: Elias is come! was the immediate answer; and then it was shewn them that John the Baptist, who had come in the spirit and power of Elias, was the true forerunner of the Lord, intended by the prophets. The "shall first come" may be explained as having a general reference to the preparatory work of the Baptist: it merely asserts, that is, the truth and fulfilment of the prophecy that such a herald of the Lord was to come. Another suggestion may be made.

The influence of the warning voice of John was still in operation : the echoes of his awful call “Repent ye,” were reverberating, like a fresh summons, among crowds, and over provinces, which his words had not reached when originally uttered. And this will virtually be the case at all times, when the solemn warnings of Heaven to the sinner precede the message of salvation. This is the restoration of the law to its proper footing : this is the restoration of the conscience to its rightful office : this is the restoration of a rebellious people to the condition in which they ought to be found as trembling penitents and supplicants. In any of these senses our Lord might say, Elijah, or Elias, shall come ; while in the stricter sense of the word, he had already come.

VERSES 14—21.

Two points are of remarkable significance in the narrative which follows : the first, that the disciples of Christ were guilty of a great sin, and deserved the title of faithless and perverse, because they had so little confidence in the power of faith ; and the second, that their faith itself was destitute of strength, because they had neglected the exercises and discipline which were proper to increase and confirm it. He, therefore, who finds himself so weak in faith that he dares not attempt anything in simple reliance on Christ, must not suppose that he is chargeable with no other sin but want of a lively faith : he is shewn, by the words of our Lord, to be guilty of that countless train of sins which always exist in the heart, and may be traced in the conduct of those, who do not think it worth their while to seek faith, or to purchase, or nourish it, at the expense of worldly thoughts, or worldly enjoyments. The instances which our Lord gives of the power of faith, cherished to its proper growth, would, doubtless, be literally exhibited, if circumstances required such illustrations of its invincible might. To desire or attempt

such proofs of its energy to gratify a vain curiosity, or to compel the disbeliever into a momentary and unspiritual assent to the Gospel, can never enter the mind of a true disciple of Christ. But there are numerous and important occasions for the exercise of faith in the common course of life; and that an appeal is so rarely made to its power, convicts the majority of professing Christians, either of the total want of faith, or of the sin of neglecting to nourish it by prayer, and the wholesome discipline of self-humiliation and self-denial. The losses which they suffer by this are more than they can conceive: mountains of care, sorrow, and vexations, would vanish under the power of that grace which they so heedlessly despise.

VERSES 22, 23.

The warning which Jesus began now more frequently to give his disciples, was dictated by pure tenderness for their feelings. It is an incidental illustration of his benevolence, full of beauty and interest. The sorrow of the disciples is touchingly shewn to have been of the sincerest and deepest kind. Their master spoke of his resurrection as plainly as he did of his sufferings and death; but they could think only of the latter,—precisely the course which mere natural feeling, simple, earnest, and full of sadness, would take in such a case.

VERSES 24—27.

The tribute money here spoken of was the half-shekel, directed by the law (Exodus xxx. 13) to be paid yearly for the support of the tabernacle. Peter knew that his master did not dispute on matters of this kind; but Jesus took the present opportunity, to remind his Apostle, that, as the lord of the Temple; as the only begotten Son of the great King, whose palace the sanctuary was, he ought not, strictly, to pay such a tax. It may possibly have been, not because of

an absolute want of the small sum, about half-a-crown, necessary to meet the demand, that Jesus wrought the miracle by which it was supplied. The mind of Peter may have required some strong stimulant to keep it clear from doubts and perplexities; and the ready proof of royalty, of the unlimited domination possessed over all nature, which Jesus so immediately gave, was admirably adapted to teach the most sceptical, that when he claimed the right to be exempted from tribute, he made no idle boast.

C H A P T E R XVIII.

VERSES 1—6.

As glimpses of the kingdom of Heaven burst upon the eyes of the disciples, so strong feelings of a new and strange hope were awakened in their hearts. The idea of sovereignty, however shaded by the dread of their master's sufferings and humiliation, was still sufficient to excite in them the proud expectation of their personal elevation. This was the time for them to be taught the great practical principle, without which Christianity itself can have no practical application. To be humble, to be meek and simple as a child, is as essential to the whole structure of the Christian's character, as faith is necessary to his justification. But such a disposition is not to be acquired by partial exercises of obedience to particular precepts. It is the result of conversion; of the regeneration, by which being born again of the Spirit, we become the children of God. Our Lord speaks of receiving little children in his name, as a great duty, and threatens those who reject them with grievous punishment. The love of children for Christ's sake, and the earnest desire to train them up in devout obedience to God and the Gospel, will be found, if narrowly examined, to exist in most intimate con-

nexion with all the best and noblest virtues of the evangelical character.

VERSES 7—9.

Sin exists in the world as an active principle. Speaking practically, therefore, offences must needs come ; but no man can excuse himself for sinning on this plea. According to the present state of nature, diseases and various afflictions of the body must needs be ; but a man may avoid notoriously infected localities, and, in ordinary cases, can protect himself against dangerous accidents. So, too, with regard to sin. Temptation may be shunned ; and, upon a careful consideration of the subject, it will be discovered, that of the numberless sins of which an individual may have been guilty, by far the greater part will be directly attributable, not even to a seeming necessity, as far as he was concerned, but to his own indulged corruption and wilfulness. Woe unto him, therefore, through whom offences come. Woe unto him, who will spare himself in anything, through which he endangers his everlasting salvation !

VERSES 10—14.

Our Lord inculcates in this discourse a general feeling of tender, thoughtful care for the young and helpless. The state of children renders them effectual claimants on Divine mercy ; and God demands of all men, that they do not, by their violence, inconsiderateness, or by any other means, injure the influence of his fatherly bounty. But, in some respects, the poor, benighted wanderer from the fold of God, is in a condition of helplessness, not unlike that of a weak and simple child. The connection between the two cases was strongly felt by the loving Jesus : he wished it to be so by his disciples ; and, hence, while he cautions them not to hinder the salvation of a child, he warns them, not less significantly, to put no

stumbling block in the way of a penitent and returning sinner.

VERSES 15—17.

Private disputes and enmities are dangerous to the souls of both the parties between whom they exist. If anger be, in any case, allowable, wrath cannot; nor must the feeling, excited by the first surprises of passion, be suffered to continue. The most certain remedy for an evil, so contrary to spiritual-mindedness, is that prescribed by our Lord. Let pride, let every other emotion, be so subjected to the necessities of holiness, that no obstacle may be allowed to prevent a quiet interview, or correspondence, with the offending, or offended party. If this avail not, then let discreet and impartial friends be consulted. If their interference, unhappily, prove useless, then, if the matter be of importance to the character and happiness of the party who has sought reconciliation, let him tell his case to the religious society of which he is a member; and this means failing, let him remain contented. It is not his fault, that he is now compelled to regard his former friend as a stranger.

VERSES 18—20.

Jesus addresses his disciples in this case as truly and spiritually united to him. It is not as outwardly professing his Gospel, or as formally constituting a Church, that he gives them the power, or endows them with the privilege, here spoken of. That he was not speaking to the Apostles, or any class of ministers, exclusively, in the present instance, ought to be carefully observed. The precept, “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, &c.,” was evidently addressed to believers generally; and there is no change in the form of address; no pause in the discourse, when he proceeds to say, “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, &c.” The latter

no more applies to ministers of religion, in a restrictive sense, than the former. Whatever genuine, spiritual, earnest disciples of Christ pronounce worthy of God, fitting for the kingdom, will be acknowledged as such by the corresponding judgment of Christ: whatever they shall condemn, He will disown. Nor can it be doubted but that that which they shall thoughtfully consent to ask, He will grant.

VERSES 21—35.

The peculiar care with which our Lord inculcates the duty of forgiving injuries, is eminently deserving of attention. No limit is to be set to the pardon of those who come and acknowledge their errors and offences. To refuse to be reconciled to an enemy, under these circumstances, is utterly to despise the injunctions of our Lord. He might have simply commanded us to obey Him, in this respect. It might have been merely his will, that we should humble ourselves, and submit to his dictation. But on this, as on so many other subjects, He condescends to reason with us; and by one of the most striking of his parables shews, how utterly inconsistent it is for us to be seeking, and rejoicing in the pardon of God, against whom our sins are numberless, while we refuse to pardon the insignificant offences committed against us miserable sinners by a fellow sinner. Some difficulty may be supposed to exist in the circumstance that, according to the parable, the lord had forgiven the debt of ten thousand talents, but yet cast his servant into prison, and delivered him to the tormentors. But, no doubt, upon a strict enquiry, in any such case, the debt confessed would be found to be far from the whole of the deficiency in the accounts of the fraudulent servant. According to the parable, a just enquiry was instituted; and it was not, strictly speaking, because of the ten thousand talents, but because of numberless other proofs of dishonesty, that the wicked and unmerciful servant was punished so severely.

C H A P T E R XIX.

VERSES 1—12.

Among the proofs which exist of the respect entertained for our Lord, in spite of every effort to the contrary, are the frequent appeals made to him on matters of great social importance. In some cases, and in all, with regard to a portion of the inquirers, the object was simply to entrap him in his talk; but there is fair reason to believe that, in every place, there were some few earnest, honest disputants, who, when they approached him with their questions, really wished to learn what was right. It was probably so in the present instance. To those who looked at the letter of the law, or at the traditions derived from it, the original and proper constitution of marriage presented a difficulty. This difficulty is at once set aside, with all the vain and wicked devices of a sensual world, by the simple and absolute restoration of the primal law of marriage to its universal application. So deeply imbued were all classes of men with the prevailing corruption, that the disciples questioned the wisdom of marrying under such conditions. Our Lord intimated that while genuine purity, even in its lowest degree, can only be attained to by the help of Divine grace, so it is possible in its highest form to those who are prepared for it by God. A condition in which the temptations to vice are forcibly annihilated, is one to which the precepts and probation of morality have no relation.

VERSES 13—15.

The incident here recorded was a fresh display of our Lord's tenderness and benevolence. It proves how confident the hearts of mothers were, that Jesus was their children's friend.

No harshness, on the part of his disciples, could prevent their seeking his blessing. Would that all professedly Christian mothers felt and acted in the same way still! Would that they could be made practically to understand, that it is not enough to bring their children to Christ once, in baptism. They must be ever bringing them to Him, by discourse, by prayer; by representations of his love; by convincing arguments of his presence. That which He himself tells us of the mystery of a child's nature, and of the relation in which it stands to Heaven, ought to inspire us with reverence, as well as love, for children, and to fill us with extreme dread at the thought of leaving them exposed to the corruptions of the world.

VERSES 16—26.

Among the few sincere inquirers who sought the instructions of our Lord, was the young man who now put to him the all-important question recorded. His youth, and the acknowledged piety and morality which marked his conduct, would have admirably fitted him for the school of a philosopher, or for a seat at the feet of Gamaliel. It would be a great mistake to suppose that he could have attained to this degree of virtue, without many exercises of self-denial. There must be some sacrifice in every case of moral action and improvement. But it is the Gospel only which shews the necessity, and makes its demands accordingly, of the entire sacrifice of our self-will, and of whatever clings to it, to the purposes and glory of God. Had the young man here spoken of been poor instead of rich, he would have made an exception to some other demand upon his presumed perfection; but from the marked expressions of our Lord, riches are evidently to be regarded as the most fatal of earthly snares. The common passions of our nature wear themselves out. It is generally only for a season that the most violent

temptations retain their force. But the pride fostered by wealth, with all its various forms of selfishness, commonly continues to extreme old age. It is invincible to all the applications of human morality: but it may be overcome, and rooted up, by the power of Divine grace.

VERSES 27—30.

It was natural for the disciples, on hearing their master speak thus, to think of the ready and hearty devotion with which they had left all to follow him. He lovingly acknowledged the claim which they made upon his bounty; and the grandeur of the views which he opened to them in the re-Genesis; in the new creation; in that new Heaven and new earth, which shall attend the restoration of all things to the original design of God, might well satisfy them that whatever sacrifice they had already made, or might still make, in honour of their master, it would be well made even for themselves. It is the forgetfulness of this great truth, that nothing must be kept back from God, which endangers the salvation of so many. The young man who believed himself so fitted for the kingdom of Heaven could not enter, because he plainly loved his wealth better than Jesus. Thus he who thought to be first was last; while many a poor penitent, unboastful and unknown, but surrendering the whole heart to God, became first.

CHAPTER XX.

VERSES 1—16.

An important connection may be traced between the following parable, and the concluding part of the preceding chapter. The rich young man evidently entertained an opinion, that for his long obedience to God's commandments he deserved admission to his kingdom. But

there was a secret want of fidelity. He had but partially surrendered himself to the service of his master. In the case of those who were called into the vineyard at different hours, there was a mere compact. As far as the labourers were concerned, no higher principle entered into the agreement than the desire and expectation of gain. In this respect there was no difference between those who came first, and those who came last, into the vineyard : and the master did no wrong to the former when he refused to pay them more, because by an accident, not by any meritorious choice of theirs, they were called to his service before those who, equally by accident, and without any reference to merit, entered it at a later hour. All were treated with the strictest justice ; because each was paid to the full that for which he wrought. But grace, which, by its very nature, must be free, followed upon justice. And who shall say to God, that his mercy shall act only according to the narrow views and notions of the human understanding ?

VERSES 17—19.

Amidst all the wonderful truths and suggestions imparted to the minds of the disciples, the one awful fact of his approaching sufferings was that with which Jesus was now most anxious to familiarize their thoughts. Unprepared for this trial of faith, they might have totally sunk under so fearful a catastrophe. But a mysterious power attended his words; a power which, doubtless, acted with exact proportion to the necessity of the case ; and thus, though they were stunned, and scattered like sheep which had lost their shepherd, the vital force of the Lord's words secretly supported them, and kept their faith alive till he himself returned with larger supplies of grace.

VERSES 20—28.

The mother of James and John may have been encouraged in her ambitious views by some instances of especial favour exhibited towards them by Jesus. Being still ignorant of the real character of the kingdom about to be established, it was not unnatural for her as a mother to be solicitous to raise her sons to the highest place in the monarch's regard. Jesus treated her error with tenderness. It was the disciples who allowed the indulgence of a wrathful feeling, when they heard of the request. Their master made use of it to teach two important truths. The one, that the appointment to the places of supreme glory in Heaven depends upon a dispensation reaching far above the order of the visible Church; and therefore is not to be determined by the Son, independent of the Father; nor to be claimed as necessarily the consequence of either zeal or suffering. The second lesson, derived from the same circumstance, is that so often repeated, inculcating the superior worth of a meek and humble spirit, to all the lofty pretensions, and boastful virtues, by which worldly men claim the homage of their fellow men. Who can doubt the truth of this principle, when the very founder of the kingdom of Heaven, established his authority by ministering to the humblest necessities of his people, and shed his blood to ransom them from bondage!

VERSES 29—34.

We are not to suppose that the blind men who hailed the approach of Jesus, merely obeyed a sudden impulse when they cried, "Have mercy on us." In all probability, they had long meditated upon the rumours generally afloat respecting his miracles and doctrine. It was faith which gave such earnestness to the tones of their voice, and which would not let them cease to pray, however loud and scornful

the rebukes of the multitude. Jesus had never, and will never, refuse to hearken to supplications offered with such simplicity and perseverance. The blind men received their sight ; and so shall the eyes of our understanding be opened, if we pray to Him with a trusting and lively faith.

C H A P T E R X X I.

VERSES 1—11.

The approach to suffering was, with Jesus, an approach to triumph. The nearer He drew to the cross, the nearer He was to his throne. This He signified by the most striking tokens. His entry into Jerusalem was designedly marked with all the circumstances proper to the progress of a king, about to exercise the highest offices of his sovereignty. Thus He claimed the homage involved in the ready tribute of loving subjects. “The Lord hath need of them,” sufficed to secure the fulfilment of all his requests : the multitude felt the grandeur of his presence ; and poured out the rejoicing emotions of their hearts in unpremeditated praise : Jerusalem was moved at his coming. To those who were familiar with the prophet Zachariah (chapter ix. v. 9), the whole scene appeared as an evident accomplishment of his comforting and sublime prediction ; and an impression was made on the minds of the people which, however evanescent in regard to the greater number, prepared no inconsiderable portion of them for the faithful and permanent acknowledgment of Jesus as their Redeemer and their king.

VERSES 12—16.

Our Lord had, at an earlier period of his course, manifested his right to assert the holiness of the temple as his Father’s house. But He seems, in the present case, to have acted with the sterner air of an offended king. In the former

instance, He contented himself with simply referring to the future resurrection of his body ; but now He wrought miracles in the sight of his enemies, and accepted, as his due, the hosannas of those humble, gentle souls, which were the first to feel the power of his blessing.

VERSES 17—22.

The tranquillity of Bethany, a little rural village, not quite two miles from Jerusalem, afforded, we may believe, sweet and refreshing repose both to Jesus and his disciples. In going and returning, they had many topics for discourse ; but one of a new and startling character was suggested by the barren fig-tree. Our Lord, humanly speaking, expected to be nourished by its fruit. It bore no fruit ; and He pronounced the sentence which doomed it to decay. By this action, He only intended to enforce the lesson which He had so strongly impressed upon the minds of his disciples, “ Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, He taketh away,” and “ Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.” (John xv.) Dull, indeed, must have been the minds which could not perceive the application. But the power evinced excited more attention than the lesson ; and our Lord again led the fitful, capricious thoughts of his disciples to the ennobling consideration that, if they proved faithful to him, they should never want power to work whatever miracles might be necessary to prove their divine commission.

VERSES 23—27.

The dilemma in which our Lord placed the Scribes and Pharisees, by his question concerning John, was not to be escaped even by their subtlest sophistry. John had borne full and direct testimony to the Messiahship of Jesus. If, therefore, it should be allowed that he baptised with authority

from Heaven, this was virtually to acknowledge Jesus to be the Christ. No conclusion could have been more destructive to their perverse and haughty plans of domination than this. They naturally, therefore, looked eagerly at the alternative. They might altogether repudiate John's pretensions to the authority of a prophet. At first sight, there would appear no great danger in such a course : but a little reflection soon convinced them that it would be perilous to treat lightly a name so dear to the people. They were, therefore, compelled to confess with shame that they did not know ; and no one was found sufficiently bold after this to insist upon an answer to the question put to Jesus.

VERSES 28—32.

In the case referred to by our Lord, it was the Jewish people divided into two classes ; but all mankind may be viewed as similarly divided ; the one class pretending to receive, and to be ready to obey, the commandments of God ; the other remaining long in open rebellion, but at last repenting, and thankfully engaging in the service of their heavenly Father. Thus the Scribes and Pharisees, and the wealthier classes of the Jews generally, professed obedience to God ; but when John re-asserted the purity of the Divine law ; when he pointed out the offences by which it had been set at nought ; and invited men to the baptism of repentance, and newness of life, none of these boasters submitted to the test ; nor, even after time had been given them for consideration, would they do the will of their compassionate God. On the contrary, the poorest among the people, and those accounted the most corrupt, on hearing the call to repentance, and the implied offer of mercy, gladly availed themselves of the proffered salvation ; and they who had long refused to do the work of their heavenly Father, became the foremost in executing his bidding.

VERSES 33—41.

The representation of God's chosen people under the figure of a vineyard, was familiar to every reader of the old prophets. Readily adopting this beautiful and gracious image, a proud nation might easily flatter itself into the belief that the likeness was preserved through each successive generation. But, as in the case of the prophecies respecting the Messiah, they ought to have borne in mind, that, mingled with images of grandeur and delight, were those of sorrow, shame, and deep distress. Our Lord's parable must forcibly have brought this to the recollection of some of his hearers. God had sent first one prophet, and then another, to claim the fruits of obedience and holiness at the hands of his people. They had been rejected, and, in some instances, cruelly martyred. At last He sent his Son. In the parable, it is a human mind reasoning on the probability of the Son's being accepted and obeyed; and, according to the fair calculations of experience, success might be rightly looked for. Still more would this have been the case, anterior to the fact, had a quiet, simple, unprejudiced intellect been employed in considering how the Son of God would be received among his people. It would scarcely have entered into the thoughts of any one, reasoning upon ordinary principles, that the most benign of men, the most generous, the most majestic in spirit but the meekest in bearing and conduct, would be spurned with indignity from the people whom he called his own, and whom he came to bless. The motive to this conduct is intimated in the words, "Let us seize on his inheritance;" for, had it been possible for this reprobate nation, as it now madly hoped, to defeat God's purposes in respect to Jesus, it might have continued for an indefinite period to pursue its abandoned course. Unwittingly, Chief Priests and Pharisees, in their hasty acknowledgment of a palpable truth, passed a bitter condemnation on themselves.

VERSES 42—46.

None of the ancient prophecies are more strikingly significant than that here quoted by our Lord. First, the Psalmist, and then Isaiah (Ps. cxviii. 22., Is. xxviii. 16) represented the future Saviour under the image of a tried, precious, corner, or foundation stone; to be rejected, indeed, by those first employed in building the living temple, but to be afterwards, and for ever, proved to be the only support, and connecting power, of the whole structure. To make that rock a stumbling stone; to be offended, that is, at the offer of salvation afforded through Jesus, is to incur the ruin necessarily suffered by those who reject Divine mercy. But in the case of those who not only neglect the Gospel, but despise, oppose, and blaspheme it, that stone shall fall with a crushing force, which shall consign them to eternal misery. There was a terrible truth in these parables, which even the proud, perverse hearts of the Chief Priests and Pharisees, could not gainsay; and they would fain have trampled the stern reformer under their feet. But the fear, awe, and love, which they saw expressed in the countenances of the people, held them back; and they passively confessed the divinity of him, whom the vices of their hearts led them to reject.

CHAPTER XXII.

VERSES 1—10.

Particular attention ought to be paid to the series of parables related by our Lord at the close of his ministry, not only because of their essential and general worth, but because of their close application to the then condition of the Jews. Such recitals would have been utterly wanting in a proper ground-work of meaning, had they not referred to real circumstances, and the actual condition of a living people. In the

present parable, we see a nation invited to partake of the particular blessings provided for them by the especial favour of God. They reject them. He then, in the ever active benevolence of his nature, offers the same blessings to a larger class of his creatures. His love is only imperfectly confessed ; but still it expands in demonstrations of energy ; numberless souls are embraced within the circle which it describes ; it has a law ; for love even must have its laws and its limits. But it provides for the necessity which its own perfections thus creates. Every guest at its feast must have a wedding garment, and, therefore, and so it was in eastern entertainments, it provides the mantle for those who could not gain it for themselves : that is, God, by free grace, by the righteousness of his son, by the work of his own spirit, will furnish the robe of holiness for every poor, penitent sinner, who only comes with a heart ready to accept his bounty. If this grace, if this sublime and grand benignity on the part of the great King be rejected, who can complain, if being, through his own fault, without a wedding garment, he be rejected, and cast into the outer darkness ?

VERSES 15—22.

It is generally supposed, that the Herodians were persons strongly attached to King Herod, and anxious to support his cause, and that of the Roman Government, against the antagonists who could scarcely fail to appear among the old, and more patriotic Jews. Two parties thus existed in the country. The one urging the necessity of a loyal and faithful obedience to a foreign power : the other, more generous but bigotted, always inclined to seize upon every pretence for attempting to shake off the heathen yoke. Our Lord ever avoided the snare into which his enemies endeavoured to draw him, by mingling his doctrines with the principles of the one or the other of the dominant parties.

In the present case, he referred the whole controversy to a very simple principle. All parties had acknowledged the right of the Roman Government to the temporal sovereignty of the land. This was seen by the superscription of the coin universally circulated. But God was no less owned and worshipped by the faithful Jew: the one duty was not incompatible with the other. Let both, was Christ's emphatic lesson, be humbly, conscientiously, and earnestly, fulfilled.

VERSES 23—33.

Another class of disputants now presented themselves before our Lord; and we cannot help thinking, as before observed, that though there was a mixture of malice in every instance, there was also a prevailing desire, on the part of many inquirers, to know what so great and acute an intellect, as that evidently possessed by Jesus, might determine on questions of a curious and difficult kind. Viewing the results of the resurrection in the dim light of natural reason, still further lessened by the calculations of sensuality, the difficulty suggested by the Sadducees created a real and startling doubt. If earthly relations should continue unbroken by death, innumerable conflicting claims must exist to disturb the harmony of Heaven. But all human relations have a twofold character, answerable to that of human nature itself. They are both earthly and spiritual: the one must be dissolved when the earthly and the temporal purpose has been served. The other is under different laws: and is not dependent upon earth or time, and, therefore, may be continued through eternity. Hence, though the difficulty suggested by the Sadducees would involve the doctrine of the resurrection in perplexity, did earthly relations, as earthly, remain undissolved, no such difficulty exists when the same relations are beheld as spiritual. In this case they may be dissolved, or not, by the change from time to eternity.

The earthly tie is necessarily broken. If a spiritual union exist between the husband and wife, it will depend upon their mutual fidelity whether it be preserved or not. There is no reason in the nature of things why it should not continue for ever. Many modifications, many degrees of intensity, may belong to such a union; and these may render the relation more or less intimate in different cases; as is the fact with friendship, more or less diffused, more or less intense. But even the extraordinary instance suggested by the Sadducees could offer, when thus considered, no obstacle to the most literal adoption of the doctrine of the resurrection. It is, however, on the clear, express word of God, that our faith in this happy truth most confidently rests. While he calls himself the God of those who have left this world, we may be quite sure that they are living in some other sphere. He could not be their God, if they were not living, for how, if they were not, could they have a God? The resurrection of the dead, as here spoken of, is to be regarded as the general attainment of a higher state of existence after the death of the body. It is in this way only that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, can be contemplated as even now among the living. That they are so, is necessary to the force of our Lord's argument; which must have been absolutely unintelligible to the Sadducees had it referred to the resurrection of the body, to take place thousands of years after their decease.

VERSES 34—40.

It was not with a wrong, or inappropriate feeling, that the lawyer, hearing our Lord's acute reasoning with the Sadducees, desired to test his views on the grand principles of the moral law. The answers which he gave had a Divine simplicity; and they ought to be employed continually by his disciples, as a reply to all the sophistry and excuses which

the corrupt, or foolish heart so perpetually urges in apology for sin, for pride, vanity, and worldliness.

VERSES 41—46.

The impression made by our Lord's words, on this occasion, seems to have been strong and profound. There was a pause in the clamour of the multitude; and the Sadducees and Pharisees experienced, for the moment, an emotion which compelled them to remain silent. Jesus took advantage of the circumstance, to ask a question, which tended still further to deepen the seriousness which prevailed. David spoke of Messiah as already seated on the throne of God; and yet it was known that he was to be his son. How could he be both his lord and his son, taking the former title as implying pre-existence and divinity? The wisest of the Scribes dare not attempt an answer to this question; but the simplest of Christ's disciples, taught by his spirit, can answer it with understanding.

C H A P T E R XXIII.

VERSES 1—12.

Our Lord's instruction to his disciples, and to the people generally, to treat the commands of those who sat in Moses' seat, with respect, was dictated by supreme wisdom. No servile obedience to a sensual or unholy rule was here demanded. It was only as they occupied the place of Moses, that the Scribes and Pharisees were to be obeyed. Any act or command not proper to them, in that capacity, did not belong to the rule established by our Lord. This was quite intelligible to those whom he addressed. Many things might be commanded by those who administered the ordinary religious affairs of the Jews, which, though perhaps superfluous, and even bordering on oppression, might not be directly

hostile to the law of Moses. Many things, corrupt as these rulers were themselves, might be even proper and useful, considering the state of the people, for the upholding of the ancient faith. In the latter case, it was plainly a duty to obey, for the sake of the law; in the former, it would be so for the preservation of a general habit of humility and order. But, in both instances, it was to those who sat in Moses' seat that the obedience was to be rendered. When these persons violated their right to the position which they thus occupied, the precept of our Lord no longer applied to their commands. They had passed the limits within which their power was properly confined. That this was the meaning of our Lord, is evident from the severity with which he warns his hearers from following their example in those numberless superstitions and corruptions by which they sought to gratify their vanity, or promote their selfish interests. The lesson of humility, repeated, as we see, on every occasion on which it could be introduced, is here interwoven with the sharp rebukes levelled against those who had been led into their worst sins by forgetting it. Some public reasons, as in the case of oaths, may be alleged in defence of the use of titles; but Christians cannot be too careful in regard to names, titles, or forms of address, which serve only for the purpose of private conceit, or personal exaltation.

VERSES 13—22.

The general consequence of arrogance and superstition is not only estrangement from God, on the part of those who have thus darkened their own minds, but a determined hostility to the improvement of mankind. Without the enjoyment of Divine grace themselves, they cannot endure to see others striving after it. Their object is earthly gain. For this they are ready to trample on the most sacred rights of humanity; and though they would keep their own lips, and the lips of

others, for ever closed, if they were only to be opened for the sake of sincere prayer, they care not how long they pray, when, by the pretence of prayer, they can throw a veil over their hypocrisy. Their efforts to obtain proselytes are made in the same spirit. They would despise the idea of saving a soul ; but they will leave nothing undone to secure the addition of another to the list of disseminators and reprobates. The meaning and holiness of oaths had been utterly destroyed by these hypocrites. By means of the most absurd distinctions, the minds of the people were diverted from the only real sanction of an oath, and were led to regard objects of mere imaginary sanctity as giving force to their vows. Both fraud and blasphemy were involved in this practice. On the one hand, room was given for evasion ; on the other, there was the most flagrant violation of the law, "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and shalt swear by his name." (Deut. vi. 13.)

VERSES 23—33.

It is not without a reasonable chance of success, that hypocrites in religion hope to gain by attention to the most insignificant duties, what others only look for by the sincerest exercise of holiness. The world can better understand a number of separate and often repeated displays of outward strictness, than it can the tranquil, unostentatious, unvarying obedience of a soul simply devoted to God. Hence it will often reward the former with its confidence, with its gifts and preferments, while the latter are left wholly to their hopes of a better state. But woe be to those who thus succeed in their hypocrisy : woe be to the man who makes the religion which, in spirit, he neither loves nor obeys, a stepping-stone to reputation or fortune. Let the awful words of his Lord, the severest, perhaps, which He ever spake upon earth, sink deep into his soul, and excite in it a converting terror !

VERSES 34—39.

The daring spirit of rebellion with which, for many ages past, the Jewish people had despised the ordinances of God, still left a portion of his mercy unexhausted. They had rejected his prophets, and had not feared to spill innocent blood even in the courts of his own house. Who the Zacharias was, whose death is here described, seems involved in doubt. The account answers, in every respect, except as to the name of the father, to that which is given (2 Chron. xxiv. 21.) of the death of Zachariah, the son of Jehoiada : and as it is not difficult to suggest explanations of the slight difference of name, this was probably the martyr referred to by our Lord. But among a people so fierce and sanguinary as the Jews, it is not at all unlikely that some other case of this kind may have occurred, well remembered among them, though not recorded in history. Witnesses to divine truth, messengers both of anger and of mercy, were to follow close upon our Lord himself. But they were to succeed no better with this hardened people : the day of grace was drawing to its close ; and He, who had so often come, the angel of the covenant of mercy, with healing on his wings, was, henceforth, only to appear when mere awe at his presence should compel the trembling sinner to exclaim, “Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

VERSES 1—8.

It was the immediate object of our Lord, in the prophecies here recorded, to warn his disciples against the approaching dissolution of the ancient commonwealth. To this he was incidentally led by the wish of his followers to elicit from him some expression of admiration for the wonders of the temple ;

its vast proportions, and the splendour of its ornaments. Instead, however, of fostering the delight with which they gazed upon this emblem of their national glory, he presented to their trembling souls visions of unparalleled confusion and distress. The gorgeous temple became a deformed heap of ruins : deceivers were heard on all sides proclaiming themselves the Messiah ; the dreadful note of war roused slumbering nations to a sense of approaching destruction ; the mightiest cities were converted into stagnant pools by earthquakes ; and amid the terrified multitudes which these scourges spared, stalked the still more dreadful forms of famine and the pestilence. And these, said the Divine speaker, with awful emphasis, are “the beginning of sorrows.”

VERSES 9—22.

While such was the general picture offered to the contemplation of the disciples, it was important that they should be warned of the troubles to which they, and their brethren, would be exposed. Persecution, in all its various forms, was to assail them ; and the faithful, in the midst of their sufferings, would have to deplore the malice of false, and the weakness of unstable, brethren. A lying spirit would be abroad, and many, neglecting to arm themselves with the shield of faith, would fall victims to his machinations. But amidst all the gloom, there was a bright and shining light : the promise was sure and steadfast, that he who endured to the end should be saved. This blessed source of personal consolation was accompanied by another of more general application : the Gospel was to be made known in all the then peopled parts of the world. The sign by which they who attended thoughtfully to the words of their Lord, might know when the end approached, was distinctly pointed out : for who could doubt, when they learnt that the standard of a heathen conqueror stood in the midst of the Temple, and that all the abominations of idolatry

were perpetrated in its courts, that this was the sign to be given of the predicted end? Merciful and tender was the spirit which ceased from this awful tone of prophecy, burdened with such a theme, to give practical instructions to those who might live to behold these scenes of woe, or who might leave children to expect them. It is in this light of a loving solicitude for their safety, that the present instructions of Christ to his followers, ought to be viewed; and in thus interpreting them, we have a fresh, and very beautiful, illustration of his ever thoughtful benevolence. That he did not give these lessons in vain is credible from the very nature of the case; but it is rendered more so from the ancient account, that his disciples, watching as he had taught them, the signs of the times, found a safe refuge in the little town of Pella.

VERSES 23—28.

Our Lord must have regarded the danger to which his disciples would be exposed by false prophets and false Christs, as demanding peculiar watchfulness. It does not appear, however, that he apprehended their being tempted to leave him for another Messiah; but rather that they might be deceived into the notion of his re-appearance before the appointed time. To guard them effectually against the pretensions of these deceivers, he proclaimed that the demonstration of his coming power would not be with a slow and gradual advance, but sudden as the flight of the winged lightning. It was thus, in fact, that he did come, and execute his judgment on Jerusalem. The Roman eagles were gathered together ready for the prey: and then he himself descended, like a thunderbolt; and the structure of ages perished in the furnace which his wrath had kindled.

VERSES 29—41.

There is an evident, but most solemn, transition, in this passage of our Lord's discourse, from the prophetic delineation of a great temporal convulsion, to that of an event which shall finally determine the condition of the human race. In the former instance, helps were given to define the period when the foretold calamity would happen : in the present, it is distinctly stated, that not even the angels in Heaven are forewarned of the day when the judgment shall commence. A reason may be suggested for the difference in the two cases. In the former, the temporal, physical safety and interests of men were concerned ; and they were to be guarded by ordinary foresight ; but in the latter case, it is necessary that the soul should devote itself simply to God ; that, without calculation, without the remotest idea of measuring its love by the question of when it must begin to love, for the sake of safety, it should, whether a moment or millions of years, may intervene between the present and the day of judgment, simply and wholly live unto God. Even the angels are not to be trusted with a secret upon which such important interests depend. They may themselves, in some mysterious respects, be deeply concerned in the events which shall terminate the existence of the present universe. To know precisely when that occurrence shall take place, might greatly disturb the higher development of their own moral nature ; while it is more than possible that, being trusted with such a secret, they might be surprised into revealing it either to man directly, or to man through some intermediate intelligence. It was not inconsistent with this transition from the prophecy of the approaching ruin of the Jewish nation, to that of the dissolution of the world at large, to introduce warnings or images which referred sometimes to the one, and sometimes to the other. A thoughtful listener

or reader might readily understand, and still may so understand, the meaning of our Lord. Some things which he said had an evident reference to the fall of Jerusalem; others, wholly inapplicable to that event are as clearly referable to the circumstances which will mark the end of the world. Reason and the light of Divine wisdom are both available in the humble, earnest study of these grand passages of revelation; and they who will employ such guides will find in prophecy a sufficient clue to the labyrinths of the world, and a source of quickening life and energy which will prepare them for the end of all things.

VERSES 42—51.

After giving a very sufficient reason for not communicating to the world the hour of his coming which, were it known, would be the only hour in which the world would serve him, our Lord teaches a lesson which, had it been studied by the rulers, or by any dominant party, of the Church, must have rendered persecution unknown and impossible. In almost every case in which the fellow servants of the superior servant, in the Christian Church, has suffered at his hands, it has been a proof that he had before neglected to give them their meat in due season. Pure, simple truth, has never been a persecutor. In every instance, in which persecution has been supposed necessary to bring men to religion, the real teaching of Divine truth has been grossly and perseveringly neglected. Let every man of a proud, persecuting disposition, repeat the last verse of this chapter whenever he feels most like himself.

CHAPTER XXV.

VERSES 1—13.

This exquisitely beautiful parable teaches, with the most gentle and loving tenderness, the same lesson as that conveyed, under a sterner form, in the preceding chapter. It was at a late hour in the evening that marriages took place among the Jews. The bridegroom, when conducting his bride from her paternal home, was accompanied by a gay train of youthful maidens, who, with lighted lamps, shed a cheering and emblematic light upon his path. Neglect is not always the fruit of disregard. There may be much affection where there is some listlessness and sloth. But the latter are always fatal to the interests of the former. Thus the virgins generally not only slumbered, but slept; and in this they were an emblem of mankind, who, at the best, must yield to the infirmity of nature. But some of them had provided against this infirmity. They had taken oil with their lamps; and when they suddenly awoke from their slumber, they were prepared to meet the lord of the feast. The great fault of their companions was, not that they were without affection; not that they were really indifferent to the occasion, but that they allowed themselves to be reasoned into the notion, that any time would do to make themselves ready for the bridegroom's coming. And this is the case with at least half the number of professing Christians. They do not despise Christ; but they cannot persuade themselves to be provided, under all circumstances, and, at any moment, to hail his approach. They slumber and sleep, and zealous Christians do the same; but the latter before they sleep examine their lamps, and look to their means of reviving the dying flame; the former go to sleep, and leave these things to chance. But it is evident, from the parable, that

Christ will not accept so imperfect a devotion : those who are not ready for him, whenever he may appear, must be contented with the outer darkness.

VERSES 14—30.

The former parable teaches watchfulness ; the present inculcates the duty of diligence. God dispenses talents in various degrees to all his creatures, and they are given in trust to be employed first for his honour and glory, and next for the proper purposes of human existence, both individual and general. No talent can be left unexercised for these objects, without involving the possessor in the sin of having wasted his master's goods. The promise of a reward for diligence is broad, distinct, and exhilarating. It is not concealed that the greatest talents, and the highest trusts are but the means of faithfulness in little things : this should keep the most richly endowed, and the most largely trusted, meek and lowly ; but, faithful in these little things, they shall be exalted to stations of true glory in the world to come, and shall enter into the joy of their Lord. The apology, often made by those who possess no conspicuous power of doing good, for doing no good at all, is evidently false and untenable. It is not their fault to have been trusted with little, but it is their fault not to do the best with that little. To indulge themselves in idleness and sloth, because they dread God's severe inspection of their work, is to suppose that a jealous God will be more indulgent to him who does nothing, than to him who, though he can do but little, does that little reverently and well. This parable, in fact, reaches all classes of society, and men of every degree of capacity. Natural ability, favourable opportunities, and every measure of grace, constitute the talents which God has distributed among his people ; and for the employment of which they must inevitably render an account.

VERSES 31—46.

Faith in the love of Christ, and in the sufficiency of his merits to secure our acceptance with God, cannot fail to awaken the most anxious desire to serve him. This desire will have its origin in love; in love, created by the admiration of what is supremely good, and in the experience of its influence on our own state and prospects. Such is the ruling feeling of true believers in Christ; and the immediate consequence is an anxious enquiry as to how he may best be served; how the power of his Gospel may be most readily exhibited to the world? The answer is soon received. He has poor and suffering disciples. These he accounts one with himself: if they hunger, he hungers; if they be naked or in prison, their griefs are his. Who, then, who loves him, can doubt what to do? There is the object: there is the immediate occasion, by which loyalty and love to Jesus may, according to his own suggestion, be immediately proved. If such means of serving him be habitually neglected or despised, ought it to be doubted but that when, at the last day, his reputed disciples are put to the test, he will accept or reject them according to the proof which they have given of the sincerity of their profession?

C H A P T E R XXVI.

VERSES 1—5.

The transition from this discourse, on matters of general import, to the simple, unaffected statement that his own death was just at hand, affords one of the most beautiful of the many incidental illustrations of our Lord's character. How nobly sustained; how grandly superior to all earthly considerations must He have been, who knew, that after two short days, he must hang bleeding on the cross, and with such a death before him, could wholly confine his attention to subjects connected

with the good of his people. The instantaneous passage from the mention of his death to that of the machinations of the Pharisees, by which it was to be effected, is a no less remarkable feature in the style of the Gospel narrative. It is startling to find how Jesus anticipated all that was about to be done; and how, immediately after he had spoken, the work was begun.

VERSES 6—13.

Feelings of the most various kind prevailed respecting Jesus even at this late period of his earthly ministry. There was a struggle in the hearts of many between the dread of encountering the dangers which must attend confessing him, and the still greater dread of being found guilty of rejecting the Messiah. It was this conflict of rival fears which led many, who listened to his discourses, to adopt a course marked by doubt and inconsistency. Thus Simon felt it wise to invite him to his table; but his hospitality was cold and churlish. (Luke vii. 44.) The disciples rejoiced generally in seeing their master honoured, and yet more than one of them shared, it is probable, in the feeling of Judas, that the pouring out of the precious ointment upon his head was a somewhat too expensive display of zeal. Jesus knew how they reasoned, and taught a great lesson in answer to their affected frugality and charity. It was pure, simple love, which prompted the woman to act as she did; and the act itself was as prophetic as it was gracious. She obeyed the teaching of God in thus honouring Jesus; and nothing can be more certain than that whenever anything can be done, tending directly to the glory of God and the Redeemer, no other claimant upon our attention or our means can lawfully be allowed. Nor is it possible that any real duty should ever be violated by such a rule of action. "The poor," said our Lord, "ye have always with you." And so with every thing. When the glory has been given to

God, no proper opportunity of doing good to men will ever be found to have irrecoverably passed by.

VERSES 14—16.

The mind of Judas could no longer endure the mingled tenderness and sublimity of our Lord's discourses. They struck in direct conflict at his hideous passions; and it is the common course of human nature to become worse and worse, the nearer it comes in contact with the wisdom and the holiness to which it refuses to submit. It could not have been mere avarice which tempted Judas to betray his master. He might have employed numberless arts to obtain an immeasurably higher price for his villainy, had money been his chief aim. Prophecy marked the exact sum which he would receive; but he would probably have been as ready to take ten as thirty pieces of silver. Offended pride, malice, jealousy, the despair of ever becoming the true follower of such a master—all operated on his feelings, naturally base and mean, till the hatred of his heart was ripe, and he could resist it no longer.

VERSES 17—25.

In their question, “Where shall we prepare for the Passover?” the disciples betrayed a state of mind much more characterised by the common anxieties of daily life, or by the excitement attending the associations of customary festivals, than by the anticipation of a new order of things; of the opening of a dispensation which should end for ever the typical rites of the law. From the directions which our Lord gave, and especially from his wishing it to be understood by the man, whose guest he was about to be, that his time was at hand, there seems every reason to suppose that the person referred to was well disposed towards his doctrine. The necessary preparations were made with a speed which indi-

cates that every friendly facility was afforded for their completion. Never had the cheerful voices of brethren, at a paschal feast, been interrupted by an announcement so startling and so awful as that which now broke upon the ears of the disciples. Each, as the meaning of the words stole upon his confused and agitated mind, felt as if in the natural weakness and corruption of his heart, there was a dreadful possibility, that he might be pointed at; that he, in fact, might be the betrayer. Hence the hurried, "Lord, is it I?" This feeling lasted but for a moment among the eleven. The twelfth was probably stunned, at first, by the discovery, that his treason was not hid from the glance of his wondrous master. As his mind grew steadier, it is possible he might question himself as to whether he was really about to commit the crime, the dark shadow of which now flitted before him. But it is also possible that he might purposely chime in with the rest, and ask "Is it I?" in the spirit of a diabolical irony.

VERSES 26—35.

A far deeper and more lasting impression had, doubtless, been made upon the minds of the disciples, by the words of our Lord, "My flesh is meat indeed; and my blood is drink indeed," than is commonly supposed. There were links of thought; deep, vital associations of feeling, connecting the emotions awakened when those expressions were first used, with those which belonged to this mysterious hour. "Take, eat: this is my body." "Drink ye all of it: for this is my blood of the New Testament." It was impossible for those who had listened with any degree of earnestness to their master's earlier discourse, and not feel that the bread which was to be given for the life of the world, was that bread of which he was now making them partakers. They could no longer question the near approach of his death; and the knowledge that he was so soon to suffer must have thrown still

stronger light upon the meaning of his words. By such means ; by such a power ; by such an application as belonged to Him in his character of a Redeemer, saving the world by his own self-sacrifice, he could make his disciples partakers of his body and his blood in so far as they constituted the bread of life. That he does this in the case of believers, there can be no question ; and happy are they who, with a humble and simple faith, rejoice to be thus fed ; thankful that they are fed, though the mystery, in some respects, may be beyond the comprehension of their understanding. This was the last time in which Jesus was to drink of the fruit of the vine in a symbolic, or prophetical manner, with his disciples. When he next drank it with them it was in the Kingdom of Heaven, established by his sufferings ; confirmed by his Spirit ; it was new, as imbued with the life imparted to it by his merits ; new, as the quickening grace of the new covenant. The hymn spoken of was the usual paschal hymn ; and it was not till every thing had been done proper to the solemnity of the feast, that Jesus went forth, and spoke at large of the circumstances about to happen. Peter obeyed only the earnest feelings of his heart, when he professed such readiness to die with his master ; and had he been then put to the proof he would, probably, have borne any suffering rather than belie his word. The garden of Gethsemane was not so unlike the Mount of Olives as to change the current of his feelings, and he was still brave and faithful : but the lighted, crowded hall of the high priest presented another scene, and his thoughts were thrown into other channels. Divine grace alone can be certainly depended upon as sufficient to keep us true under every change of scene and condition.

VERSES 36—46.

The horror of the trial through which our Lord had now immediately to pass, can, at best, be only dimly perceived ;

but it is altogether unintelligible to those who refuse to exercise patient and devout thought. To understand, in any degree, the state of his mind in this awful hour, we must recollect that he had all the feelings, and the associations, as well as the feelings, of a human being, most nobly and delicately constituted. Death, itself, must have had its terrors; but an agonizing and an ignominious death, could not have been contemplated without emotions of intense distress. We are not speaking of these feelings as permanent. They were effectually conquered; but every victory implies a struggle; and that of Jesus must have been of the most fearful kind. His willingness to let all his disciples attend him; his actual wish to have three very near him; to keep by him, and watch, are striking indications of the subdued, trembling heart, ready in its thorough humanity, to catch hold of every natural, legitimate support, in this its anguish. Prayer, in such a case, was the necessary expression of the soul. The absence of recorded prayer from the life of Christ would have gone far to apologise for the ancient heresy, which denied his human nature. Being human, he could not but dread pain and ignominy; and when they presented themselves to his thoughts, in their most hideous forms, he could not but wish and pray that, if possible, they might depart from him. But the desire thus expressed regarded the pain only as such; and not as it was to be the means of effecting a great purpose. Hence "not my will, but thine be done," instantly followed. Jesus would not have accepted deliverance from agony at the expense of leaving his work undone. The struggle was that of a mighty soul conscious of a present full of darkness and horror; and of a future infinitely fruitful, in consequence of suffering well borne, of happiness and glory. Wonderfully tender, and stamping the whole recital with the deepest impress of reality, is the incidental account of the conduct of the

disciples; so ungracious, and yet so natural; so severely rebuked, and yet so lovingly forgiven.

VERSES 47—56.

Doubt and cowardice are betrayed in every step, and especially in this final proceeding, of the Chief Priests and their confederates. Jesus might have been apprehended at any time with safety, except on the rare occasions when the multitudes were extraordinarily excited in his favour. The kiss of Judas seems to have been permitted to shew how base a thing is broken faith; and the impetuosity of Peter to indicate how utterly vain is the sword drawn in defence of Jesus; for while it, in this instance, availed not to deliver him from his enemies, so neither would he allow it to be thought that he could need such defence; or that he would ever avail himself of it. What more absurd than the notion, that he can want the aid of a human arm, when, at a word, twelve legions of angels, at any time, would stand around him in battle array? Jesus does not ordinarily choose material force to defend his honour: but when he does, it is not that which the madness of intemperate zeal, or persecution would provide. Could he by any possibility require such help, no better proof can be given of the looseness of the foundation upon which his kingdom would then rest, than the simple statement, that, in the hour of his greatest necessity, his disciples “all forsook him, and fled.”

VERSES 57—68.

The conduct of the Chief Priests and Scribes was marked, at this stage of their proceeding, by great caution and subtlety. They instituted a formal trial. Their false witnesses had evidently been carefully prepared for the occasion; and when they failed to convict Jesus of any offence, the High

Priest, himself, proceeded to examine him, according to judicial form. Supposing that Jesus had not been the Son of God, the answer which he gave in reply to the High Priest's adjuration, was indeed blasphemy; and the declaration that he was worthy of death, was no exaggeration of the law.

VERSES 69—75.

The hurry and tumult which attended the condemnation of Jesus must have quickly reached the ears of Peter. With all the warnings given him he was not prepared for such an event. At once staggered and confounded, he yielded to his terror; nor had he time for a moment's thought till he had so repeated his base offence, that no opening was left for subterfuge or retraction. He could only, when he came to himself, weep bitterly, and think of his master's love.

C H A P T E R XXVII.

VERSES 1—10.

As another point illustrative of the cautious conduct of the Chief Priests, it is to be observed, that they wholly abstained from extreme measures against Jesus, after they had condemned him. They had judged him according to the law; but, of late years, the Romans, who exercised supreme civil authority in the land, had seen it wise to keep the right of capital punishment in their own power. The priests were, therefore, prudent enough to suppress their wrath for the moment, and to content themselves with declaring Jesus worthy of death, leaving it to the civil power to execute the sentence. In the repentance and despair of Judas, we see a lively picture of the condition of many a wicked man. He could not have been ignorant of the probable consequence of his treachery. But a hideous crime can never be so terrible in appearance as in reality. Judas could think of the death

of his master, the victim of his treachery still to be; but to behold him actually his victim, was a horror too great to be borne. The agreement between the prophecy of Zechariah (xi. 12, 13) and the sum paid to Judas, as well as the use made of the money, is a striking incident, as illustrative of the providential oversight of every event in our Lord's history. The name of Jeremiah, instead of Zechariah, was, probably, introduced into the narrative, by the accidental error of some ancient copyist.

VERSES 11—23.

In all likelihood, no thought was entertained by the Chief Priests and elders, that the governor would do more than simply confirm their sentence. But Pilate had general notions of justice, and his Roman spirit would not allow him to see unmoved a countenance like that of Christ, or to hear words like those which he uttered, simple though they were, without contrasting them with the uproar of base passion, which rose from the throng of Priests, Pharisees, and Scribes. That the life of Barabbas should have been asked instead of that of Jesus, must have still more offended his natural sense of right; and never before, perhaps, had so strong an emotion of awe affected him, as that which stirred his heart, when the mysterious message was sent him by his wife, "Have nothing to do with that just man."

VERSES 24—38.

Impressions, however powerful, are weak when tried at the moment of their birth by antagonist self-interests. Pilate reverenced Jesus, but he would not risk his government, or his popularity, to save him. Even a better man than Pilate might have required time to resolve upon the nobler course. As it was, he suffered the punishment due to his crime. A few years over, and he died a degraded and miserable exile. The

insults heaped upon Jesus were just such fruits of the enmity of corrupted human nature to his purity, holiness, and truth, as we still see exhibited when a mock obedience and worship is rendered to his Gospel by those, who, in reality, are ever longing and striving to trample it under their feet. That he had not strength left to bear the cross the whole way to Golgotha, another name for Calvary, is an affecting proof of the feebleness of his frame. Happy must Simon, of Cyrene, have felt, if faith taught him the mystery, at being thus chosen to bear the burden first borne by his Lord! The vinegar and gall was a mixture given to criminals on the cross, to lessen, in some degree, the sense of pain. Jesus would not thus artificially resist it. In the fulfilment of the prophetic Psalm (xxii. 18) "they parted my garments among them, &c." we have another interesting proof, that the whole of the future, even to the minutest incidents, in respect to the life of Jesus, was like a record emblazoned in golden letters on a banner, which flashed before the eyes of the prophets, and let them catch, from time to time, sentences of the most striking import.

VERSES 39—49.

The language of the Chief Priests, and those with them, was that of the most obdurate hearts. Many of them resisted even the terror which the darkness, it might have been expected, would inspire in all. But some, no doubt, were strongly moved by the awful phenomenon; and among them, probably, were those who mistook our Lord's last human cry of agony for a calling for Elias, the coming of Elias being now connected, in their terrified and conscience-stricken hearts, with some indefinite notion of the Messiahship of Jesus. Hence the wish to shew mercy: hence the haste to fill the sponge with vinegar, and to give him to drink.

VERSES 50—66.

The work of redemption was finished. No longer, in type or symbol, was the way to the holy of holies to be closed; and hence the veil which had shut out the mercy-seat in the temple at Jerusalem from the approach of all, but the High Priest, was rent in twain. The earth quaked, to betoken that, like all visible and temporal dispensations, it was, itself, to pass away when Christ's kingdom should be fulfilled. Graves opened, as if in haste to shew their obedience to his power, and to let the dead go forth at the first sound of his voice. It is almost a relief to the mind to turn from these most sublime but awful circumstances, to see how variously those about the cross were affected. The centurion made the confession of a fresh convert. The loving followers of Jesus, whom no fear could drive from his side, immediately busied themselves with offices which could best demonstrate their practical desire to do him honour. Untaught and unaffected by the signs which they had witnessed, the proud, besotted Priests and elders, were still blind enough to suppose that they had defeated Jesus: and, happily, Pilate so far consented to their wishes, that, by making the tomb as fast as they could, they unintentionally afforded the strongest contradiction that could be given to their assertion, that the body of Jesus was stolen away by his disciples. They, themselves, had rendered such a theft impossible.

C H A P T E R XXVIII.

VERSES 1—8.

How altogether different would have been the prospects, the state of mind, the feeling of Christ's disciples, had the history of the Gospel stopped at the end of the last chapter! The account of his miracles; the report of his discourses; the

agreements of prophecy, would have been almost enough to give conviction of his divinity; but it would have been only almost. Did he indeed rise again the third day? would have been the ever-recurring question among the most anxious of his people. Glory be to God both for the triumph itself, and for the record! There is not a believer in the world, who may not rightly feel himself a partaker in the splendour of the victory, which his Saviour gained over death, when, in the rolling away of the huge stone from the sepulchre, a clear indication was given, that no material weight or power shall hinder the rising of the re-quickenèd body. To none is it insignificant, that a glorious angel attended at the grave; that he was a messenger of terror to the enemies of Jesus; but to his friends, a gracious and familiar companion.

VERSES 9—15.

Some of the circumstances, following the resurrection, are related with more particularity by the other Evangelists than by St. Matthew. But enough is here told to shew, how tenderly careful our Lord was to convince the disciples of his identity: to prove that he, their master, was no ghost or vision; but their own beloved teacher. The falsehood of the Jews was as useless as it was shameful.

VERSES 16—20.

Our Lord, it may be conjectured, appointed the mountain in Galilee for his last interview with his disciples, in order to withdraw them, for the time, from the distractions of Jerusalem. In all probability, a considerable number of his followers were present. No other event seems so likely as this to have furnished an occasion for the meeting of the five hundred at once, as mentioned 1 Corin. xv. 6. Among these might be many who had but little knowledge of Jesus, and but a very imperfect comprehension of what had taken place. They

might doubt, till they drew near to him ; heard his gracious words ; and then, with their own eyes, beheld him ascend into heaven. His brief assertion, "all power is given me in heaven and in earth," may well encourage his faithful followers to fulfil his last commands, so pregnant in meaning, so fruitful in blessings, to all mankind. But there is even an addition to the encouragement which this assurance of their Lord's universal and enduring power, affords the disciples of Jesus. It is that he is with them : that in all their ways and in all their works, pursued and wrought in his name, He is present to aid and comfort them, and will be to the end of the world.

END OF THE GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK.

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INTRODUCTION.

A striking difference may be observed between the commencement of the present Gospel and that of St. Matthew. The latter begins with the generation of our Lord; the former starts from the opening of the dispensation which he came to establish. It was necessary, to the purpose which the first of the Evangelists had in view, to proclaim Christ's miraculous birth, and the wonderful circumstances attending it. His narrative was for communities comparatively newly formed; and for whose establishment in the faith it was essential that a complete abstract should be given of the great facts upon which their confidence was to rest. St. Mark, if we may trust to early history, wrote his Gospel for a narrower circle. According to tradition, he derived his principal materials from St. Peter, whom he sedulously attended at Rome. If so, his history was for a congregation well instructed in doctrine, and mainly requiring a narrative of events. The same may be said if, on another supposition, it was written at Alexandria, of which city he is said to have been the first bishop. Whatever opinion may be formed on these points, it is universally agreed, that this Gospel is peculiarly valuable for the distinctness and force which characterize the narrative; and which qualities, in subjection to the teaching of the Divine Spirit, may be ascribed to the advantages enjoyed by Mark, as the familiar associate of some of the chief Apostles.

St. Mark's Gospel.



C H A P T E R I.

V E R S E S 1—8.

"The beginning of the Gospel," is here in strict agreement with the announcement, "the kingdom of Heaven is at hand." It was when Jesus entered publicly upon his ministry that the preaching of good tidings began; and this was the beginning of the Gospel; the actual commencement, to a condemned world, of that course of restoration, of that work of grace, by which the lost was to be saved: and the dead restored to life. An earnest consideration of the particulars so briefly mentioned concerning John, will bring him to the eye of the mind in all the grandeur of his sublime character. Thus, his approach is solemnly announced, as the messenger of the Lord; and he immediately appears in the wilderness; the awful sounds of his voice making themselves heard through throngs of startled multitudes. His garb is that of a dweller among caves and deserts; his food that of one who knew no earthly appetite but to subdue it; and his mission was to those who stood trembling under the open heaven, awaiting its judgment upon their sins. He pointed to the fearful signs of divine wrath; but at the same moment he shewed how the waters of Jordan, running at his feet, invited to the baptism of repentance, and to reconciliation with God, every humble and contrite sinner. And this call to repentance, with its attendant rite, and implied promises of mercy, was followed by an announcement, significant of a deliverance, which, however imperfectly comprehended, at that time, must have been the

desire of numberless souls, conscious that even 'the truest repentance, could not, of itself, save them. Humility is one of the sublimest of virtues. As such it marked the character and language of John, when he proclaimed himself to be but the voice of one crying in the wilderness ; a messenger sent for a temporary purpose ; the servant of a master, whose shoes-latchet he was not worthy to unloose. The brief contrast drawn between the two baptisms, was itself the strongest illustration that could be given of the difference between the ministry of John, and that of Jesus.

VERSES 9—13.

It was very necessary that our Lord's baptism should be described, and that the words should be repeated by which he was made known to those who had ears to hear, that He was the Son of God. The fact, that he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, there to undergo the heaviest temptation ever yet suffered by human nature, was also essential to the design of this Gospel ; but it was not so necessary that a full account should be given of the particulars of the temptation. It was not for a people, unaided by any store of pre-existent Christian knowledge, that St. Mark wrote. Having stated the main incident, there were many of his readers who could enlarge upon it with great accuracy for the younger, or less instructed, disciples.

VERSES 14—20.

The utmost conciseness of style is here again observable ; but every important point is touched upon. We have the substance of our Lord's preaching, in its intensest and most concentrated form. The period is carefully marked when he began the complete exercise of his public ministry ; and the call of the earliest apostles is recorded with a precision which shews that, in the mind of the Evangelist, this was a very ne-

cessary feature of his record. There was, doubtless, a power in the very words which Jesus spoke. His call was felt in the hearts of those whom he addressed; but motives to obedience were suggested, when he said, "I will make you fishers of men," of which the simplest mind could not miss the whole lofty meaning.

VERSES 21—28.

Jesus was no longer alone: "And they went into Capernaum :" he had now companions, witnesses, disciples; and we have thus the first thin, gossamer-like lines of an embryo church, spreading before us. The preaching of Christ, and his power over unclean spirits, were alike astonishing, and their effects were very often remarkably combined. His word roused the devils to an agonizing resistance to his power, and his power, through his word, cast them out.

VERSES 29—34.

The chief incident here recorded has its especial, though, perhaps, not noticed value. Peter already reverenced Jesus. He had left all to follow him; but the tender, the affectionate readiness with which this gracious being exercised his power to remove a domestic calamity, was eminently calculated to inspire a heart like Peter's, with a much intenser feeling, than that of simple reverence.

VERSES 35—45.

Our Lord, in retiring to pray, had, according to his human nature, two great objects of desire. Uninterrupted communion with his Father; and the refreshing and strengthening of his soul for greater labours. Thus, after the season of prayer here spoken of, he enlarged the sphere of his preaching, and all Galilee felt the power of his word. It is curious to observe the capriciousness of men's temper, in regard to the

praises due to Christ. The sufferer cured of his leprosy, as in some other cases recorded, would publish aloud his gratitude, notwithstanding the command imposed upon him to be silent. How perpetually, on the other hand, are we called upon to proclaim aloud the goodness of our Saviour, when, not a word of earnest praise can be drawn from our lips !

C H A P T E R II.

VERSES 1—12.

In reading the account of our Lord's miracles, or the report of his discourses, as given by more than one Evangelist, it may not be unprofitable to consider, what would have been the impression made on our minds by these recitals, had we received them at somewhat distant intervals, as well as from different witnesses. If the account, when first heard, startled us, the repetition of the story, after the peculiar impression attending surprise was worn off, would excite a more earnest, a more abiding, and fruitful influence. Astonishment is, in many cases, the substitute for emotions more effectually moral ; but when the objects which excited it are again brought to notice, or when we again listen to the narrative, which created, at first, such wonder in our minds, all the higher faculties of thought will be engaged in contemplation, now undisturbed by the agitations of surprise. Hence, in addition to the value of independent witnesses to the truth of the Evangelical history, the repetition of its great facts affords a peculiar help to the soul, deepening the foundations of its faith ; and bringing into the range of its most familiar associations, multiplied instances of our Lord's united power and beneficence.

VERSES 13—17.

A careful comparison of the account given by St. Mark, of occurrences recorded also by the other Evangelists, will frequently afford a striking proof of the minute particularity of the former. It is only according to the well known custom of the Jews, in giving more than one name to the same person, that the Apostle, who calls himself Matthew, in his own Gospel, is here called Levi. Circumstances of importance to contemporaries, though of none to us, very probably led to the use of the one name in one account, and to the adoption of the other in another. The slight differences in the narrative are worth observing. We have, in each, all that is important; but it is a blessing to have them both.

VERSES 18—22.

The disciples of John, as such, were more interested in this subject, than the Pharisees. By the latter, the conduct of Jesus and his followers was mainly regarded as an occasion for censure: but in the case of John's disciples, the inquiry arose from a feeling of anxiety. The fasts referred to were not of the law, but of Rabbinical or Pharisaic institution: still they were accounted venerable, and necessary to holiness. How was it that Jesus, to whom John himself looked with such profound respect, could set at nought usages connected as yet with every notion of sanctity? The answer was readily understood by those who could discern, that it was the intention of Jesus to found the practice of holiness on new principles; to give it an internal, rather than outward, support.

VERSES 23—28.

Two purposes were effected by our Lord's triumphant answer to the Pharisees. It was necessary that he should prove his consistency with the rule which he had adopted,

that, namely, of fulfilling the whole law. This he did by shewing that the law had not been broken either by himself, or by the act of his disciples. In the next place, he brought the true nature of the Sabbath into full display. The real nature and intention of the institution had never been so plainly described. While the Sabbath is of God; commemorative of his works, and of his providences, and, therefore, holy: it is for man, and, therefore, involving in its law none of those snares which the unbenign and superstitious Pharisees had, themselves, created. Some difficulty exists with respect to the name of the High Priest. Ahimelech, and not Abiathar is spoken of in 1 Sam. xxi., but this is an obscurity admitting of many explanations, if it were not found that, in unimportant points, it is better to leave the trifling difficulty as it is, the explanation, sometimes, involving a greater.

CHAPTER III.

VERSES 1—5.

It was, no doubt, our Lord's intention to illustrate his view of the Sabbath, by the works of mercy which he performed. Had the matter been one in which charity and tenderness might have spared the prejudices of his opponents, he would have exercised his wonted mercy: but to put the Sabbath on its right footing was a main point in his teaching: and, hence, he purposely placed himself in direct collision with the proud and narrow-minded Pharisees.

VERSES 6—12.

The Pharisees and Herodians were both in doctrine and manners the most opposite of parties: the one, superstitious and scrupulous; the other imbued with principles of gross infidelity, luxurious, and worldly. But there is no difficulty

in understanding why they united in a wish to destroy Jesus. He was the stern censor of both ; and it is common, in all ages, to see men uniting to crush an opponent, who shews, in the clear light of his virtue and wisdom, the hideous form of their opposite vices. His time was not yet come, and therefore he withdrew himself : but his work was never suspended. Not the slightest of the lines which marked his plan could be obliterated by a legion of enemies.

VERSES 13—21.

The instructions given to the Apostles are reported by Matthew and Luke. Had we only the present Gospel, therefore, we should miss a very interesting passage of history. A knowledge, however, of the circumstances in which the Apostles, both now and afterwards, went forth to preach, would go far to shew us what kind of instruction and warnings they would be likely to receive from their master. It is very possible, that the apparent organization of the Apostles, into a distinct body, may have greatly increased the crowd anxious to see Jesus ; and that this circumstance, with the attendant excitement, may have added to the alarm of his relations.

VERSES 22—30.

The indignation of the Scribes may also have been considerably increased by the regular institution of the Apostles. If we take the events here recorded as following close upon each other, the connection between the discovery of something like the formal foundation of a society, and the anger of the Jewish lawyers, will be readily understood. Our Lord's allusion to a kingdom, and a house, may have arisen from what he knew was passing in the minds of his opponents.

VERSES 31—35.

No mention is made of our Lord's mother in the previous account of the attempt made by his friends to withdraw him from the multitude. It is probable that, finding they had no power to bring him away, and being utterly ignorant of the real state of the case, they sought his mother, and hoped to effect their object by uniting her influence and persuasions to their own ruder purpose. This may account for the slight mixture of sternness in the reply given by our Lord.

C H A P T E R IV.

VERSES 1—20.

A striking and convincing proof of the value of this most beautiful parable is afforded by the fact of its being reported by three Evangelists. Each of those three writers composed his narrative, in the first instance, for a particular section of the Christian community. To none could this parable have been denied without a grievous loss. Hence the readers of Scripture will learn, with what earnest attention they ought to study, and apply, the lesson here taught by their heavenly master. That conscience, indeed, must be in an unhealthy state which does not lay hold of some one, or other, of the points of the parable as requiring especial note. What is the present prospect of a harvest? will the believer say, let his progress be little or much. Genuine, honest thought will convince many, that no harvest can possibly be looked for, there being a feeling in the heart which proves beyond a doubt that the seed has either been wholly lost, or was early plucked up, or choked. But then again, there will be instances of joyous hope, following upon a hardy and yet rich experience. Thirty, sixty, or a hundred-fold may be looked for; and that simply because the grace given has been cherished: the preparations of

the heart have been secured; the seed sown has been watched, and the dew of the Divine blessing has accomplished its proper office. So plain is the application of this parable, that they who cannot understand it, may well be asked, whether, out of all the vast number of parables employed to convey moral and spiritual truth, there be any likely to come within the limit of their comprehension?

VERSES 21—25.

The principle involved in this passage deserves earnest consideration. That which gives light, or the truth which diffuses itself most radiantly through the soul, is, at first, hidden under the medium through which it is conveyed. But it is not hidden that it should remain hidden: if it have been kept secret for a time, it is that it should come abroad with greater advantage in the appointed season. The parable is to yield to the plain moral: the type to the antitype: the sign to the reality. And the sooner we can dispense with the covering of symbols the better. The kernel is not to be eaten while the shell is whole. The bushel is an excellent security to the candle while it is being carried through the wind: but when once it is safe in the room it would be folly indeed still to keep it under the bushel.

VERSES 26—29.

It requires attention to determine in what point of view this comparison should be taken. If it be regarded as referring to the preachers of the Gospel, then its meaning will be this: they must be contented earnestly to preach the Word, and then, allowing themselves only just so much repose as the necessity of their nature demands, they must watch with all care for the first appearance, and then the growth, of the germinating seed. If, on the other hand, we view it in respect to individual disciples, and to ourselves, it is a lesson of

corresponding faith and patience. The means of grace must be sedulously employed : the processes by which they become available wholly belong to God : they are vital only through his blessing. A patient waiting for the day of complete redemption ; for the fulness of Christian perfection, is part of our discipline ; but God will not let a day be lost. We shall be ready for Him, if we do not resist his grace ; and as soon as we are ready for him, he will assuredly be ready for us.

VERSES 30—34.

We may easily imagine with what eager attention both the disciples, and the people generally, listened to the words of Jesus. The parables are reported to us in the shortest forms of expression : but they inspire the most moderately thoughtful reader with admiration and delight. What must have been their effect when, added to their own intrinsic charm, there was that of the living voice, and the calm, expressive, loving look of Jesus ? That he spoke in parables only is, in all probability, stated not merely to describe generally the mode of his teaching, but to intimate the exceeding richness of his mind : the boundless resources of his thoughts. He was never wanting, we imagine the Evangelist meant to say, in pictures or stories by which to convey his doctrines to the humblest understanding.

VERSES 35—41.

The intense weariness which Jesus sometimes experienced, is pathetically shewn in the incidents here recorded. It is not merely in his falling asleep that we discover the signs of his overwrought body and mind. He wished to pass over to the other side, that he might escape, at once, from any straggling part of the multitude. His disciples took him without any delay into their little ship : he seems to have fallen asleep immediately : and when he was roused from his slumber, his

the signs of despair upon his countenance ; and immediately re-assured him. “ Be not afraid : only believe.” Oh ! let us so seek to hold communion with Jesus, that he may be always near us. Then, though the world may endeavour to persuade us, that it is too late to hope or to look for comfort ; that word of his will never fail us : “ Be not afraid : only believe.”

CHAPTER VI.

VERSES 1—6.

Two slight points of difference may be remarked in this, and the corresponding passage of St. Matthew’s Gospel. Here Jesus is called the carpenter : in St. Matthew, the carpenter’s son. According to St. Mark, therefore, the tradition that he actually worked at Joseph’s business till he went forth to his ministry, is well founded. It was at Nazareth, it should be remembered, that the circumstances here recorded took place. St. Matthew says simply that he did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief : St. Mark, that he could not ; shewing the appointed connection between the action of his benignant power and the faith of the patient. This connection, was, of course, only to be looked for in cases where faith was properly, and according to the nature of the object, a qualification. The demoniacs could hardly, in themselves, be supposed to have faith. It was simply mercy to the sufferer, and the assertion of dominion, which Jesus illustrated in the expulsion of evil spirits. Still more evident is it, that the stilling of the winds and waves, and the feeding of the multitude, were mere acts of power, irrespective of faith. It is easy to imagine, that the heart of Jesus must have been greatly refreshed as he went round about the villages teaching ; the humbler souls of the people receiving, probably, his glad tidings, in a far better spirit, than the prejudiced inhabitants of Nazareth.

VERSES 7—13.

St. Matthew has reported, with much greater fulness, the instructions given to the Apostles : but had we only the succinct account afforded by Mark, we could not fail to see the object of our Lord in his admonitions to these favoured men. Faith in his providence and care ; simplicity of conduct and address, were to be their main endowments. The sentence, that they went forth, and preached that men should repent, indicates both the nature and the necessity of the qualifications which they received from their master. It may, perhaps, be questioned, whether their anointing with oil those whom they cured of sickness, was not enjoined by Jesus, with the express intention of limiting, at this period, their exercise of miraculous power. Though the means was so utterly inadequate to the end, that no doubt could be entertained of the supernatural character of these cures, yet the employment of any means at all, made a distinction between the miracles wrought by Christ, his mere word being sufficient, and those which required more than the word or the will of the agent. When the Apostles had been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and went forth in the plenitude of their ministerial power, the mode of their working miracles was closely assimilated to that of their Lord.

VERSES 14—29.

Matthew, in the corresponding account, calls Herod by his proper title, that of Tetrarch ; Mark gives him the popular appellation of king, a rank which he greatly desired, but never obtained.

VERSES 30—32.

According to Matthew, our Lord's immediate reason for seeking retirement, at this time, was the intelligence brought

him respecting the death of John the Baptist. Mark speaks as if he only desired to give his Apostles leisure and repose. It is not certain that the two circumstances, closely connected in the reading of the narrative, were so closely connected in reality. But the information which the Apostles had to give of their own labours, may have been intermixed with many accounts, deeply interesting and pathetic, and gathered in the course of their journey, respecting the last days of John.

VERSES 33—44.

There are many points in this narrative not given in the account of the miracle by St. Matthew. The observation of these differences, of greater or less copiousness, may be made both a useful and an interesting exercise; and it is one of those exercises, which, in all essential respects, may be carried on with no other help than that of a Bible with references, and even by the Bible without such references, supposing sufficient patience and earnestness on the part of the inquirer. The very difficulty with which some people make such comparisons, may prove an exceedingly useful lesson: it may shew them how little attentive they have been to the wording of these infinitely important narratives.

VERSES 45—56.

Mark is more precise than Matthew, in describing the locality of the miracle, which appears to have been wrought among the mountains opposite Bethsaida, the name of two cities, the one on the north-eastern side of the lake, the other on the western, the latter that to which the ship was going, and which was well known as the abode of Peter and his brother Andrew. It would be very difficult to account for Mark's omitting the very interesting circumstance of Peter's attempt to walk upon the sea, but for the supposition that Peter, himself, furnished him with the principal materials of

his Gospel. This, however, does not wholly meet the case. Had the occurrence been altogether honourable to Peter, we might believe that his modesty forbade his recording it. But this was not the fact. He presumed upon the strength of his faith or his courage, and miserably failed. Perhaps Mark omitted the account on his own authority, and in mere respect to his teacher: that is, from the very opposite reason to that otherwise suggested. The reflection, that it was a sign of hardness of heart, to feel astonishment at the stilling of the tempest by one who had fed a multitude as Jesus had, is peculiar to Mark; and an observation of great force and beauty.

C H A P T E R VII.

VERSES 1—13.

A striking proof is given in this passage of the foreign and extensive circle of readers, for whom Mark wrote his narrative. Had it been intended for those who lived in the birth-place of the Gospel, it would not have been necessary to tell them that "the Jews eat not, except they wash their hands." The report is substantially the same with that given by St. Matthew; but there are sufficient differences to shew that the two Evangelists wrote independently of each other. Had Mark been copying Matthew, he would hardly have left out the particular observation made by our Lord, in answer to the statement, that the Pharisees were offended at what he was now teaching.

VERSES 14—23.

It is well worthy of being remarked, that, though there is a variation in the catalogue of vices as given in the two Gospels, it begins, in both cases, with evil thoughts, so forcibly must our Lord have expressed himself on this subject in his teaching. How very powerful a lesson ought we to draw from

experience, if it have tended to lessen the teachableness or susceptibility of the heart.

VERSES 17—27.

Solemn and severe as is the lesson conveyed in this example of the love of riches, there is, also, in the language and conduct of our Lord, an exquisite proof of the tenderness of his feelings. Thus, though the circumstance is not mentioned by Matthew, we are here told, that the earnest account which the young man gave of his duty to his parents, and his whole moral life, so deeply affected Jesus, that he looked on him and loved him. The addition of even a slight point in narratives of this kind will often be found to add greatly to their force and beauty ; and hence to the value of the provision made for us in the gift of four Gospels instead of one.

VERSES 28—31.

The answer of our Lord to Peter is reported with some difference by Matthew and Mark. It no doubt contained every expression to be found in the two reports put together. Each adopted a shortened, abstract form of the conversation, and set down such points as appeared most important. The expression “with persecutions,” as given by Mark, sounds strangely in the midst of a catalogue of blessings and promises. But it is inserted, probably, merely as an indication that our Lord mingled a strong warning against pride, false security, and worldliness, with the intimations which he gave, that his people might, for a season, even in this world, enjoy prosperity and wealth. “With persecutions” may thus be considered as a single expression caught from a long discourse, but strikingly characterizing the nature of the whole.

VERSES 32—45.

It is worthy of observation that, while St. Matthew speaks of the mother of Zebedee's children as claiming honour for her sons, Mark speaks of the latter only. It is evident, therefore, that whatever the mother did, it was, at least, as much the expression of the ambition of her sons, as of her own. The answer being reported by both Evangelists in such similar terms shews the importance of the doctrine which it involves.

VERSES 46—52.

That two blind men are mentioned by Matthew, and only one by Mark, creates no difficulty, when it is considered, that our Lord wrought numerous miracles of which no distinct account is given by any of the Evangelists. St. Mark describes the cure of Bartimæus, because he was well known, and his immediate restoration to sight was, therefore, better adapted to the purpose, as evangelical evidence, than that of a man whose blindness had been less subjected to public observation.

C H A P T E R XI.

VERSES 1—11.

Again we see that Mark thought it sufficient to mention the single circumstance of chief importance to his subject. Matthew speaks of the ass, "and the colt with her": Mark mentions the latter only; but he adds, as a circumstance of interest, that it was this which our Lord chose for his use, and that it was one "whereon never man sat."

VERSES 12—19.

An expression is introduced by St. Mark which does not occur in St. Matthew's account of the occurrence here de-

scribed : " For the time of figs was not yet." According to the more obvious meaning of this statement, it seems to charge our Lord with being unreasonable, in expecting to find fruit on the tree at such a period. We may be sure, however, that no disrespect is involved in this remark of the Evangelist. It is, probably, the repetition of some mere expression of surprise, originally uttered by one of the disciples who, the time of figs not being fully come, wondered at our Lord's expecting to find any on the tree by the road side. Possibly there may have been reasons, known to Jesus, though beyond the observation of others, which gave him a perfect right to look for fruit ; and hence the sentence of barrenness, pronounced as a warning for those who, in any circumstance, receiving more than common grace, do not exhibit the corresponding results. The " for the time of figs was not yet," might be properly changed into " *Yet* the time of figs was not come." Though no real connection exists between this cursing of the barren fig-tree, and the casting out of the profaners of the temple, it is easy to perceive that the same spirit, even the same train of thought and feeling, was at work in both instances.

VERSES 20—26.

This passage affords a striking example of the mode in which our Lord suppressed the useless and petulant curiosity of his disciples, and instead of telling them what it would have little profitted them to know, instructed them in a great practical principle. Peter, no doubt, was curious to learn why the fig-tree was cursed : but instead of being satisfied in this matter, he was told that, by faith, he should be able to do greater things than this, however mysterious. The knowledge that such is the power of faith, is certainly of greater worth than the knowledge of the particular reason why God works some particular miracle.

VERSES 27—33.

The close correspondence in the reports given by the Evangelists of this conversation of our Lord with the Pharisees, shews the importance attached to it in their minds. A little consideration will give us the same view of its nature. The value of John's witness to the truth of our Lord, cannot be over estimated. His own character was beyond question. Thousands bore testimony to his integrity; to the stern holiness and purity of his conduct. As little question was there that he had acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah. The point, therefore, upon which our Lord insisted, the Pharisees could only avoid either by the most dangerous falsehood, or the basest cowardice. They adopted the latter course.

CHAPTER XII.

VERSES 1—12.

The parables and discourses of our Lord at this closing, and most eventful, period of his ministry, had so intimate a connection with the last awful lesson which he taught the Jews, and the world through them, that we may naturally look for great exactness and correspondence in the reports given of his words, where that agreement is necessary to the fixing of their meaning. From the same cause, we may expect variations, where additional points may add to the value of the recital.

VERSES 13—27.

The decision given by our Lord on the subject of tribute, and the information afforded respecting the state of man, after the resurrection, are of universal interest; and hence the exactness with which both the Evangelists report his answers to the sophistical enquiries of the Pharisees and Herodians.

VERSES 28—34.

It seems from the wording of the passage, that the scribe, though one of a party, did not ask the question which he put to our Lord, from the feeling which animated his brethren. Matthew says that he addressed Jesus, “tempting him;” but Mark expressly tells us that he asked the question because he perceived that our Lord answered his opponents well. The two accounts are far from incompatible with each other. When we are highly delighted with the skill and wisdom displayed by a person of great ability, nothing is more common than the wish to try his powers farther. And in the case of moral or political disputations, the higher the confidence excited in us by the sound answers of a teacher, the more we wish to obtain his decisions on points still undetermined. The concluding observation of our Lord tends strongly to prove that the scribe was of a temper and character far better than that of the party to which he belonged.

VERSES 35—37.

It would have been a fearful thing for those who had only Mark’s Gospel, as was the case with many disciples of Christ in the early times, to have lost this precious fragment of those discourses in which he set forth his divinity.

VERSES 38—44.

It is deserving of especial observation, that Mark omits the long discourse which our Lord addressed to the Scribes and Pharisees, and which is so largely reported by St. Matthew. The Gospel of the latter was written at a time when the manners and conduct of the leading people among the Jews were fresh in the minds of many of Christ’s disciples, and when the recollection of such things threw a strong light on the history of his sufferings. It is, from other causes,

of no less importance to us, in these later days, to have the full report, given by St. Matthew, of his stern and overwhelming rebukes of his reprobate adversaries; but it was not necessary to the main object of Mark's Gospel that he should record the speeches addressed to Scribes and Pharisees. He wrote chiefly for Gentiles, for foreigners, who cared little about the peculiar temper of the Jewish sects, and to whom, probably, it might have been difficult to convey a proper notion of the real state of the parties existing in the nation. Enough, however, is said in the general lesson against pride and ostentation, and in the blessing given, with such exquisite tenderness to the poor widow's charity, to impress upon the mind of a thoughtful reader, the profoundest admiration of our Lord's moral teaching.

C H A P T E R XIII.

VERSES 1—13.

Here, as in other cases, Mark gives the substance of our Lord's discourse, as sufficient for the object of his Gospel; Matthew's reports are fuller in certain points, but in those chiefly which were likely to interest believers at an early period, and who were living in the country where the events occurred. While, however, he is thus copious, he passes over minute particulars mentioned by Mark. Thus he speaks only generally of the disciples in this conversation, whereas Mark tells us precisely who they were who made the enquiry which led to our Lord's prophetic account of the things coming upon the earth.

VERSES 14—31.

It was, no doubt, with intense earnestness that the disciples listened to every word which Jesus now uttered. The actual and almost immediate approach of the convulsions described

with such awful particularity must have aroused unspeakable emotions in their hearts. Jerusalem was before them in all its pomp and strength. Never, perhaps, had the human mind been so tried as to the confidence which it ought to place in the power and durability of things visible, or in the truth of words which pronounce upon them the sentence of destruction. Which were the disciples to believe? The apparent everlasting foundations of that mighty structure which was even now dazzling them with its glory, or those mysterious foreshadowings of its utter dissolution created in their souls by the words of Jesus? Whatever the immediate conclusion to which they came, the lesson was one which ultimately must have affected and ruled every principle of their minds. A similar result will, in every case, follow the contemplation of earthly power as subject to the plans and decrees of God—as subordinate to the interests of his kingdom and his laws. Let us look at the most splendid of the world's structures, whether material or moral; then let us weigh well the sure word of prophecy, and, unless we be blind indeed, we shall at once transfer our trust from things temporal to the invisible things of eternity.

VERSES 32—37.

The expression “Neither the Son” does not occur in the corresponding passage in St. Matthew. It may be supposed, therefore, that no truth of great importance depends upon it. The only explanation absolutely required is given by referring it to the generally allowed fact, that our Lord, speaking in his human nature, did not ascribe to himself the omniscience, or other attributes of his Deity.

CHAPTER XIV.

VERSES 1—9.

St. Matthew, in describing this occurrence, says generally “when his disciples saw it;” but Mark, speaking more precisely, says that “there were *some* that had indignation.” It is easy to imagine that if Mark wrote under the instruction of Peter, the ardent and generous Apostle would be especially careful not to charge the whole of the disciples, himself among the rest, with so mean an exhibition of deceit and covetousness.

VERSES 10—25.

Among the slight differences between this account and that in St. Matthew, there are two points unimportant in themselves, but very interesting, as shewing the exactness with which the original author of the narrative, most probably St. Peter, recollects every word in the direction given by his master. Thus, the disciples were to meet a man carrying a pitcher of water; and he was to shew them a large, upper room furnished.

VERSES 26—42.

In St. Matthew’s report of our Lord’s words, he is described as saying only “before the cock crow;” but Peter, whose ears and memory were alike sharpened by the immediate reference of the circumstances to himself, reports the conversation more exactly, and tells us that his master said, “before the cock crow twice.” Matthew again thinks it sufficient to record Peter’s two-fold asseveration of his willingness to bear all things rather than deny his Lord: but Peter himself says that “he spake the more *vehemently*,” humbly, that is, shewing, in the strongest language he could command.

the presumptuous confidence with which he trusted to a courage so soon to be proved utterly inadequate to the wants of faith and love. Again, we find from St. Matthew, that our Lord addressed Peter in particular, when he saw that the three were sleeping, while he was engaged in agonizing prayer; but in that which may be regarded as Peter's own report, we read, that our Lord addressed him by his original name, Simon, and not as Peter, an appellation associated with feelings and prospects of honour, little appropriate to one who seemed at this outset of his course, as the follower of a suffering master, so ill-prepared for toil and conflict.

VERSES 43—52.

St. Matthew gives some particulars, not recorded by Mark: but it is to the latter we are indebted for the incident described at the end of this passage; and which has a meaning that adds greatly to the deep pathos of the whole recital. When it is told us that they “all forsook him, and fled,” we see the well-known and zealous followers of Jesus, yielding to unexpected terror, and leaving their beloved master deserted in the midst of his enemies. But a poor, obscure disciple, one unnamed, and, probably, unknown, had sufficient affection and courage still to remain. While he stood there, Jesus was not quite alone: but it was not long that this humble, zealous stranger, could resist the dread which had overcome Peter and the other Apostles; he, too, yielded to the power of darkness: and the absolute loneliness of Jesus appears far more intensely melancholy by this last instance of desertion, than it would have seemed, had it been left us to suppose that, though the Apostles fled, fearing for themselves, still some less noted followers of their master might have remained about him.

VERSES 53—65.

To the question, put by the High Priest, “tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God?” Matthew records the answer, as given by our Lord in the oriental idiom, “Thou hast said:” Mark, writing for a people not acquainted with eastern forms of speech, translates our Lord’s reply into the simple “I am.” It is important, on the other hand, to observe how all the grand particulars of these events are noted by both Evangelists. That they covered our Lord’s face, is an additional circumstance mentioned by St. Mark.

VERSES 66—72.

The first crowing of the cock is a striking incident in Peter’s temptation. It adds greatly to the painfulness of the feeling excited by his cowardice and falsehood. The first lie had been told, and the reproach and warning followed. There was still time for prayer, and for the heart to recover its better feelings. But the sign was unnoticed or disregarded. The sin was again and again committed. Warning could now avail nothing: and the sign which, observed in time, might have saved the poor offender from inexpressible grief, could now only excite in his soul the bitterest sense of shame. None of the other Evangelists records this first crowing of the cock. It was a circumstance of main importance to Peter himself. No length of years could lessen the acuteness of the feeling with which he remembered the events of that night. The more he experienced the mighty working of Divine love in his soul, the more he must have lamented his early treason.

CHAPTER XV.

VERSES 1—14.

Some circumstances of great interest are here omitted by St. Mark, and we have again reason to rejoice in that wisdom and goodness of the Lord, through which, by means of the four Gospels, we are supplied with so complete a history of these transactions. The real character of Barrabbas could only have been guessed at from St. Matthew's account: but here we learn that he had been guilty of the two-fold enormity of insurrection and murder. Whoever he had been as a criminal, the choice of him by the people, to the rejection of the innocent, truth-speaking, and most beneficent Jesus, would have reflected shame upon the multitude, and their leaders. But their infamy is vastly increased, when we learn the fact, that the wretched culprit, whom they wished to send loose upon the world, while they doomed to the cross the man who had healed their sicknesses, blessed their children, and taught them the noblest truths, was a vile disturber of the public peace, and a murderer.

VERSES 15—24.

The scourging, as a part of the barbarous preparations for the cross, exhibits our Lord in the first actual stage of his suffering. Thus, while the voices of his own people were first raised against him, the hand of the heathen Pilate was the first to inflict those stripes upon him, whereby we are healed. Pain and insult were the attendants of this judicial act; but it opened the way to inflictions of a still more oppressive and degrading character. Till the scourge had been raised, and fallen upon Jesus, the blaspheming soldiers, and scoffing multitude, dare not touch him. But there was

now no barrier to their cruelty, or their insults : the criminal, who had been scourged, stood helpless in their hands. What a picture for the sinner, still continuing in his sins, to contemplate ! Was all this misery, this insult, borne by the Son of God in vain ?

VERSES 25—38.

A difficulty exists in the statement made by Mark, that "it was the third hour, and they crucified him." St. John, on the other hand, says that it was about the sixth hour, when Pilate was preparing to pass sentence upon Jesus. Many explanations have been given of this apparent incongruity. The Evangelists may have adopted, the one the eastern, the other the western, mode of reckoning time ; but, perhaps, the best, as the most natural method of shewing that these sacred writers do not contradict each other, may be learnt from the consideration, that they were describing a crowd of events, and that, accordingly, one might date from one, and another from another. The narrative of St. Mark may actually refer to a circumstance which, in the mind of the original narrator, made the third hour an especially noted part of the day. To St. John, that was not the point, in its eventful course, most impressively chronicled. The sixth hour was most fraught to his mind, with solemn associations ; and he consequently made it the central epoch of his narrative. In edifying contrast with these slight differences, and corresponding efforts of minute criticism, is the harmony of all the Evangelists in their account of every circumstance important to the history.

VERSES 39—47.

It is not undeserving of notice, that in St. Matthew's account, the earthquake, "and those things that were done," are spoken of as eliciting the expression, "truly this was the Son of God ;" but it is also to be observed, that there, not

only the centurion, but those that were with him, are spoken of. In Mark's account, the centurion alone is alluded to. Now it is highly probable, that the band of soldiers with him, were far more affected by the earthquake, by the darkness, and the other convulsions of nature, than by the voice of Jesus; and that it was by these signs, rather than by the awful solemnity of his cry, that their hearts were moved to confess his Deity. The centurion, on the contrary, being a man of keener observation and feeling, would be more deeply impressed with the mysterious language of Jesus, and hence was led, as Mark describes, to own him as the Son of God, while his ruder companions came to the same conclusion, by evidence better adapted to their capacity. Minute differences of this kind, if fully investigated, would frequently serve as interesting proofs of the honesty with which the original witnesses of the events described, tell what they themselves saw, that is, what part of the scene most affected them; and so, of what they heard, what points in the discourse seemed to them of greatest import. There is a value even in the slight addition given by St. Mark to the account of Joseph of Arimathæa, not merely, as in Matthew, "a rich man," but "an honourable counsellor;" not merely, "Jesus' disciple," but one who, "also waited for the kingdom of God;" not merely going to Pilate, but "going in boldly;" not simply receiving the body as taken down already, and then wrapping it in linen; but first buying fine linen, that is, purchasing and preparing it to receive the body, and then going to the cross to superintend the descent himself. These are points on which no great truth is left to depend; but they have a value of their own, as bringing more distinctly before us one of the most faithful of Christ's early disciples, and faithful though rich and high in station.

CHAPTER XVI.

VERSES 1—8.

The conclusion of St. Mark's Gospel affords such full, though condensed, testimony to all the great facts pertaining to our Lord's resurrection, that had we no other than this brief history of that most important of all events, it would be sufficient, if properly and candidly studied, to establish our faith and hope. "Who shall roll us away the stone?" How natural was this question at the time! But as it was natural that the women should thus speak to each other, when fearing an insuperable obstacle to their pious duty, it was quite as natural for them, in their future conversations with the disciples, often to recur to this circumstance, and to repeat how they asked each other, in doubt and dismay, by what means they were to obtain entrance into the sepulchre. Mark, or Peter, had, no doubt, frequently heard them speak on this subject. St. Matthew relates some circumstances of great interest not mentioned here; but the very essence of both narratives is to be found in the simple words, "He is risen!" The apparent discrepancies may be ascribed, for the most part, to a different arrangement of circumstances; each of the three women, probably, describing with especial earnestness and exactness that which interested her the most, and each being the main authority in this, or that, little party of disciples.

VERSES 9—13.

The appearance of our Lord to Mary Magdalene, and to the disciples who were going into the country, though so briefly spoken of, is one of the most striking features in the history of the resurrection. Persons occupying a comparatively humble place in the list of his disciples were made the

first witnesses of his triumph over the grave: they enjoyed the high privilege of announcing, even to the greatest of the Apostles, that the Lord was risen indeed. In contrast with the unspeakably joyful feelings with which these messengers announced that they had seen Jesus, are the sorrow and disbelief of the other disciples. They doubted the Magdalene; and it is conceivable that they might justify their doubts on the plea, that grief had wrought in her an unhealthy excitement, and that she was deceived by her own imaginations. But two of their own party had seen the tomb empty: this fact alone ought to have rendered them more willing to listen to the statement of Mary. Even, supposing, however, that they might reasonably pause before they gave full credence to her account, they had no excuse for rejecting that of the two quiet, intelligent men, who had hastened back from Emmaus to communicate the tidings that they had seen and talked with Jesus. In no case, perhaps, has the obstinacy of natural unbelief been more signally displayed; but it is evident, that just in proportion to the unbelief of the early disciples, while yet unsatisfied of any of the great facts of the Gospel, is the value of the testimony which they bore to its truth as soon as their doubts were removed.

VERSES 14—20.

The Apostles had committed no slight offence in refusing to accept the first witnesses of their Lord's resurrection. But their sin must not be confounded with that of ordinary infidelity. They were wholly occupied with a desire to see the Lord. They wanted something beyond what faith could give, but their wishes and affections were all looking in the same direction as faith. No witness but that of their own senses would suffice them. In this they sinned; but it was not from a feeling discordant with faith, but from an unwil-

lingness to accept from others, what they regarded as more immediately their own. If Jesus was indeed risen, why had he not appeared to them? Now, infidelity is generally not the consequence of such an excessive desire to see and enjoy immediate communion with Christ, that nothing less than such evidence will content the soul; but it may be almost always traced to feelings, passions, habits, which tend to make him an object of dread instead of desire. The mode, consequently in which the mind reasons, in this case, is the opposite of that by which the Apostles argued. They had such love to Christ, that no act of faith could supply the want of his presence; with them, to believe was not enough: with the infidel it is too much. He has no wish to be with Christ; and he will, therefore, make no hearty effort to become a believer. Faith would carry him, with all his vices, too near the cross: would expose him, with all his deformities, to the light of heaven. The awful penalty attached to unbelief, on the authority of our Lord, ought to render us especially alive to every consideration illustrative of its nature.

Never before was so vast a history condensed into a summary like this! Happy ought every believer to consider himself, that, in the existence of Christ's people; in the privileges which they enjoy; in the manifest power of the Divine word; and the prevailing influences of the Holy Spirit, a present and ever-increasing proof is given, both of the truth of the Saviour's promises, and of the glory of his kingdom.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE.



INTRODUCTION.

Of the four narratives, forming together the complete history of our Lord's earthly ministry, this of St. Luke is by far the longest and richest section. The author may, in some respects, be regarded as standing in the same relation to the other Evangelists as St. Paul stood to those who were Apostles before him. Originally a Gentile, and whether ever a convert to Judaism is uncertain, St. Luke must have been led by an especial call, by grace operating through extraordinary circumstances, to contribute this invaluable addition to the earlier Gospels. It is generally allowed that he is the Luke, the beloved physician, alluded to by St. Paul, Colos. iv, 14. He is spoken of in some ecclesiastical writings as a painter, but this statement is founded on a very late and obscure tradition. That he was a frequent companion of St. Paul appears from several expressions in the Acts of the Apostles, and some writers think that traces of Paul's peculiar style, and mode of reasoning, may be easily detected both in his Gospel and in the Acts. No doubt exists that this Gospel was written originally in Greek; and one of the fathers states expressly that it was composed while its author was in the parts of Bœotia and Achaia. It is not so easy to determine the date of its production: but it seems certain that it was written between the years 52 and 58. That which is peculiar to it, in the way of additional facts, parables, and discourses, will be noticed in the commentary.

St. Luke's Gospel.



CHAPTER I.

VERSES 1—4.

We learn, from this introductory passage, the interesting fact, that, within about twenty years from our Lord's ascension, there already existed numerous written accounts of his life and ministry. It is also evident that the usual consequences of wide-spread popular reports had followed; and that some of the histories contained various misrepresentations, while others were rendered unworthy of the subject by incompleteness and confusion. Who Theophilus was is not known; but the epithet "most excellent" shews him, according to the language of the times, to have been a person of some distinction. As a believer, he had received instruction in the faith, and could, catechetically or doctrinally, give a reason for the hope which was in him; but he had not opportunities of obtaining exact historical information. Like many other believers at that early period, he had learnt only the greater facts of our Lord's progress. The want which he felt, in this respect, was not only painful, but was attended with a certain degree of danger; and hence the friendly and wise anxiety of Luke to give him full and exact information. The Evangelist himself had not been an eye-witness of the facts which he records; but he had an intimate acquaintance with those who were, from the beginning, both "eye-witnesses and ministers of the word;" and he had taken so deep and personal an interest in the whole subject, that he could lay claim to the credit of having had a perfect understanding of it from

the very first. Here, then, we have the work of a man of education and intellect, who examined carefully the whole mass of information respecting our Lord, as it had been accumulated from the numerous sources of intelligence naturally existing ; for it ought not to be forgotten that thousands of people had seen his miracles, and heard his discourses ; and that some would remember one thing and some another ; and that, in after years, the various fragments of information thus existing, would be kept more or less free from error, according to the care with which men of ability, and observation, compared one testimony with another. St. Luke was eminently qualified for such a task. Even prior to the consideration of the help which he derived from the blessed Spirit, we see in the very plan which he laid down for himself the sure indications of an acute and judicious mind. Well might Theophilus, and well may every believer, rejoice in the possession of a history of the Saviour written by such a man.

VERSES 5—10.

This passage is marked by a minute historical character. Herod is not alluded to incidentally, but chronologically ; and the course to which Zacharias belonged, is mentioned for the same purpose of fixing accurately the precise time at which the events described occurred. A remnant only remained of the magnificent sacerdotal establishment, cherished by the piety of David and Solomon : but so much of the ancient arrangements was preserved as sufficed to keep up the regular service of the temple, and to prevent its dependence upon any novel or capricious proceeding of the priests. Each course served from Sabbath to Sabbath, that is, for one week ; and the portions of the daily service were assigned by lot. Hence, there was a Divine Providence in the circumstance, that on the especial day here spoken of, Zacharias had, as his part of the duty, that which was considered the most

honourable in the service of the Tabernacle. In the burning of the incense, he stood at an altar within the holy place; and his act was the beautiful and appointed symbol of the prayers of the people then assembled about the altar of sacrifice. It adds greatly to the venerable character of John, that his mother, as well as his father, was a descendant of the great priestly family, and that she was a holy woman, both legally and spiritually.

VERSES 11—17.

The right side of the altar was that of dignity and authority ; and no grander proof could have been given, that a wonderful new epoch was about to be commenced in the ways of God, than this appearance of the angel. He had descended from heaven : he stood distinctly visible before the aged priest ; and his words were no less plainly and distinctly audible. The promise which this glorious visitant announced, was an answer to prayer ; and a prayer which, no doubt, comprehended much more than the simple desire for offspring. Zacharias was one of those true Israelites who, amid the gross darkness in which his people were involved, still yearned and looked for light. He knew that the desired deliverance must come in the fulfilment of prophecy ; and as he lifted up his soul to God, no feeling could be stronger in such a man than the hope that he might be the father of a son destined to wake Israel from its sloth, and bring it by the ways of a preparatory repentance to the Lord. As the angel described the character, and drew an outline of the history of the promised son, Zacharias saw that each thought of his heart had been known in heaven ; and that his prayer, in all its completeness, was about to be fulfilled. Neither wine nor strong drink was to pass the lips of him whose voice was to be charged with the sternest summons of the law ; but a spirit of power was to rest upon him ; and to work through

his word, as it did through that of Elijah, breaking or melting the hardest hearts, and confounding obstinate wickedness by the terrors of a judgment to come.

VERSES 18—25.

The first emotion of Zacharias, on seeing the angel, was that of fear. As the one with which he felt impressed subsided, doubts and questionings arose in his mind. There was sin in this ; but a sin rather of infirmity than of perverseness. It was, therefore, punished, because of its evil nature; but only lightly, because it required reproof rather than chastisement. His countenance and whole manner bore ample testimony to the astonished people that he had been the subject of some supernatural visitation. Hebron, one of the cities appointed for the priests, and the habitation of Zacharias, was about eighteen miles from Jerusalem. He had, therefore, no long journey to make after his week's ministration in the temple.

VERSES 26—38.

In this case, as in every other, in which the narrative refers to circumstances originally confined to one individual, we must ascribe the information to statements first made in friendly converse ; and then gradually diffused through a wider and wider circle, as the number of those interested in the subject continued to increase. First, Joseph, and then Elisabeth, would hear the account from Mary herself, then Zacharias, and afterwards the more intimate friends, present at the birth of John, would have the same account repeated to them by Elisabeth. Piety, curiosity, and love would all combine to preserve an exact remembrance of whatever the blessed virgin, in the fulness of her humble, joyous faith, had communicated to her aged kinswoman. It was from information thus preserved that Luke derived the materials

of his narrative, the beauty of which is in proportion to its interest. Of the spiritual lessons to be found in this passage, the most striking is that which may be learnt from comparing the doubting mind of the old, experienced priest, with the ready faith of the weak, assenting virgin.

VERSES 39—45.

Hebron was the city of Juda here spoken of. It was situated in the midst of mountains ; and as the ancient abode of Abraham, and the other patriarchs, was well fitted to aid the inspiration of those profound and glowing hopes which had been thus suddenly awakened in the hearts of Mary and Elisabeth. The emotions of the latter might have been as great as they were from the natural effect of surprise : but they could not have been understood without the presence of the Holy Ghost. It was to his illumination she owed the knowledge, not that Mary was miraculously a mother, but that she was the mother of her Lord: it was to him she was indebted, not merely for the joy which she felt, but for the conviction that her own offspring already confessed with a glad homage the nearness of incarnate deity.

VERSES 46—56.

This beautiful expression of a sublime and ecstatic joy was, doubtless, the immediate effect of present inspiration. But the highest degree of Divine influence does not necessarily obliterate the impressions of memory, or the traces of thought proper to faith, or other gifts. And, hence, in the song of the virgin, we may look for features of natural character ; with the signs of supernatural aspirations, for the mingled gentleness and meekness of her original disposition, and the grandeur of a hope tinging every thought of her meek heart with the hues of heroism. Without bearing this in mind, we can form no proper idea of the language of her hymn. In mere humi-

lity and tenderness, she could never have framed such a song; and as little likely would she have been to temper her ecstasy with such a self-denying meekness had she been moved only by a lofty inspiration.

VERSES 57—66.

Elisabeth's neighbours and relations partook of that deep spirit of prophetic piety, which had led her to rejoice in the expected birth of a son. But they had not been informed of the whole of the mysterious circumstances on which her own faith rested. They naturally, therefore, desired that the child might be named after his father; but it was by grace, or favour, that he was given; and hence, as directed by the angel, his parents called him John, a name, in Hebrew especially, signifying the mercy or goodness through which any blessing is enjoyed. The first use which Zacharias made of his recovered speech was to praise God; after which he, no doubt, communicated to his astonished friends all that had taken place when he stood ministering at the altar of incense in the temple.

VERSES 67—80.

The hymn of Zacharias has all the grandeur belonging to the expression of ancient patriotism. His soul was filled with the recollection of those times of old, when God spoke with his fathers; when he entered into covenant with them; and established the throne of David. The promises which gave a permanent glory to those events, and converted Israel from a kingdom of this world into the kingdom of God, were now dawning into fulfilment. Zacharias had even now, perhaps, only an imperfect comprehension of the real nature of the dispensation of which his son was to be the herald; but he saw enough of the Divine plan to know that it would end in the regeneration and final happiness of his people. John's

preparation for his high office is powerfully depicted in the few words which speak of his growth, probably referring to a noble natural constitution, capable of enduring any kind of privation and any amount of toil; of his waxing strong in spirit, a proof that from childhood upward, his mind was characterized by the growth of those mighty faculties which fitted him both intellectually and morally to cope with the proudest as well as the basest of sinners; and, lastly, of his dwelling in the deserts, shewing that it was alone with God, and in the sternest exercises of self-discipline, that he studied the lessons set him to learn as the prophet of the Highest.

CHAPTER II.

VERSES 1—6.

An historical difficulty is found in this passage on comparing it with secular annals. Cyrenius, it appears, was not actually governor of Syria till ten years after the events here described. But it is not uncommon to speak of public men according to the rank which they may have acquired at a period subsequent to some particular undertaking. It is also said, that there were two taxings, or rather enrolments, with which Cyrenius was concerned, and that the passage may be more properly, translated, "this was the first assessment of Cyrenius, governor of Syria," that is, of the Cyrenius who was afterwards made governor of Syria, and who was thus employed in a preparatory or experimental census, the actual collection of the tax being accomplished when he became governor. Some critics, however, propose that the word translated "first," should be rendered "before," for which there is authority in John i. 15. But that which is most important for consideration, in this passage, are the providential circumstances through which Joseph and Mary

were led to Bethlehem. A striking prophecy was thereby fulfilled; and by means which rendered its fulfilment so much the more remarkable, since they were means altogether independent of the will or predetermination of Joseph and Mary. They had no share in planning the enrolment, or in fixing the time when it should take place. It is the world, after all, and the rulers of the world, who have the greatest instrumental share in the fulfilment of prophecy, and thereby in demonstrating the very truth which they oppose.

VERSES 7—14.

The first passage in our Lord's history may be regarded as a symbol of the whole. No room could be found for him in the inn. That is, the spacious caravansary, fitted for the accommodation of crowds of guests, had no place for him who, though he is "King of Kings and Lord of Lords," because his kingdom was not then to be of this world, was the last to be thought of, or provided for. Here was, in fact, the same poverty, the same absence of all outward aids to comfort or enjoyment, as that which elicited from him the saying of his maturer years; "the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." In wonderful, and even magnificent, contrast to this, his low condition in respect to earthly things, is the glory poured around him from heaven. The angels who announced his birth to the shepherds, ought to be considered as the centre of a vast circle of splendour and harmony, comprehending Bethlehem in its bright sphere, and awakening many a heart to the consciousness of a heavenly presence, to be revealed more palpably in due time. The announcement of the angels has had its progressive fulfilment, from the shepherds who first heard it, up to the very last act of the blessed Spirit, by which a sinner was brought to God, and made the friend of his fellow men.

VERSES 15—20.

The sign by which the shepherds were to learn the truth of the angelic message, was a very simple one. But it was sufficient for the purpose ; and when they found the infant Jesus, under the circumstances which had been so minutely described, they were fully satisfied that they had a right to comfort themselves with the assurance, and to proclaim to others, that the Redeemer of their people, the Saviour of Israel, and of the world, was born.

VERSES 21—24.

The humanity of Jesus subjected him to the general law of our race : his circumcision brought him under a yet stricter rule. By the former he was confined within the circle of a finite being ; and of one, as lower than the angels, more limited than many others. But, by the latter, he was hedged within the inclosure of a dispensation proper to man as amenable to God's wrath ; and to which, though voluntary, he became as certainly exposed in his representative character, and by his legal acceptance of the covenant of works, as if he had himself broken the laws violated by those whom he consented to represent. The name Jesus, whenever given him, would have been significant of the closest union in his person of mercy, power, and love ; but it deserves particular notice, that it was given him at the very moment when he became vicariously subject to the law. The offering brought by his mother was of the simplest kind. It is usually concluded that her poverty alone was the cause of her bringing the least expensive sacrifice. But ought we to be quite sure that this was the case ? May it not be conjectured, that her profound humility ; her exceeding meekness, and her spiritual understanding, had more to do in her avoiding all show in this matter than her mere poverty ? A woman, who went up

every year to Jerusalem, was not likely to be suffering from an extreme degree of necessity.

VERSES 25—35.

A great distinction may be observed between the song of Simeon and the hymns of Mary and Zacharias. The latter are conceived in a spirit more national than individual : the excessive grandeur of the images which they present to us : the very depth of the light in which they are invested, fill us with awe : but in the song of Simeon, there is a tenderness which keeps it within the range of our commonest sympathies. We hear the aged man rejoicing in the assurance of a salvation for which, as believers, we have ourselves been looking, and, perhaps, long looking, and yearning. It is also interesting to observe how everything said of him is attributed to the influence of Divine grace. Thus, “the Holy Ghost was upon him.” “It was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost,” and he came “by the Spirit,” into the temple. This was the power which, while it enabled him at once to recognise Jesus as his own salvation, taught him also to discover, in his appearance, the dawning glory of Israel, and the light of the world at large. The mention of the fall of many; of the sign which should be spoken against, and of the sword which should pierce the soul of Mary, seems to intimate that the devout old man had a clearer foresight of some parts of the history of Jesus, than any of the preceding speakers.

VERSES 36—38.

The particular account given of Anna, shews that she was a person who enjoyed some distinction, in her time ; and was venerable, not only for her age and piety, but for her prophetic endowments. These, probably, consisted, not in any power of predicting events, but in that of explaining Divine mysteries, and urging the claims of holiness with peculiar

force. Her constant attendance in the temple ; her fastings and prayers ; shew that devotion was the business of her life. It is no wonder that Jesus should be revealed to such a worshipper ; but that people, like Simeon and Anna, should have been among the first to recognise and confess him, may be regarded as a very interesting species of evidence to the truth of the gospel history.

VERSES 39—40.

Luke did not deem it necessary to mention the flight into Egypt ; a circumstance of great consequence in the eyes of Matthew, writing, at first, for those who would so readily see both its historical and prophetic importance. Luke was contented to record, that it was in the poor and obscure town of Nazareth that Jesus grew up, the wonders of his nature gradually unfolding themselves, without external help or stimulant.

VERSES 41—52.

Only one occurrence is recorded of our Saviour's early life ; but that occurrence is remarkably adapted to afford the information about which alone we can have any proper anxiety. Thus it clearly shews the strict religion of Joseph and Mary : but it proves also that they were not solitary in their habits of life, and that Jesus, from his childhood, took pleasure in social intercourse ; for it was not in some by-path of the wilderness that, on being missed, it was supposed he might be found, but among friends and kinsfolks. And, further, we may conclude from the circumstance, that it was not till they had gone a day's journey, that Joseph and Mary thought it necessary to seek him, that he was allowed a freedom corresponding to the evident greatness of his understanding. Human affections and natural fear limited the confidence which was thus inspired ; and, hence, it was with

extreme anxiety, that his parents returned to Jerusalem, seeking him. But that anxiety met with a rebuke, which intimates, that enough of his extraordinary nature had been already manifested to render any question about his movements unbecoming, or unnecessary. His conversation with the doctors in the temple, also affords a proof that he was now richly imbued with the learning proper to his nation. It was upon this only that a discourse with such men could have been founded: and remote as Nazareth was from schools of human erudition, the ancient scriptures might be studied there as in every other place where there was a synagogue. In all these respects we are, of course, contemplating our Lord's character in its human development; and it deserves to be remarked that St. Luke particularly records, that after the occurrence above related, he went down to Nazareth, and was subject unto his parents: no interruption to the human relation between them, having followed the brief assertion of independence on the occasion spoken of. The mention made of his increasing in wisdom and stature, has a particular force in connection with the additional statement, that he also increased in favour with God and man. In all probability, the outward grace and dignity of his person had their full proportion of influence in securing him the favour of man, as here stated.

CHAPTER III.

VERSES 1—6.

The only very important chronological points in the history of the Gospel are determined with great precision by Matthew and Luke. We learn from them that it was at the end of the reign of Herod the Great, that Jesus was born; and that he began his ministry in the reign of Tiberius, and when Pontius

Pilate was governor of Judæa, and the rest of Palestine under the rule of certain well-known princes, the mention of whom fixes the time, independent of other dates, to a particular part of the reign of the emperor Tiberius. Minute questions of chronology may well engage the minds of learned and acute men: but for all the most important purposes of Christian evidence it is enough for us to know exactly when our Lord was born, and when he began his labours. To be able precisely to fix the great epoch of the Gospel is, in many respects, of the highest value to the interests of the truth. Obscurity in this matter would have given a vast advantage to the enemy. It would have been pretended that the system of our faith sprang up at indefinite, distant periods. Some would have ascribed it to a season of darkness favourable to fraud: others to times of cunning political enterprise; and another class would have sought for its origin in the branches of a recondite philosophy, partly eastern, and partly classical. But all these theories may be readily overthrown by a proper appeal to the known fact, that the author of our religion was born in the reign of Augustus, and accomplished his ministry in that of Tiberius.

Annas and Caiaphas could not both be high priest, in the same sense in which Aaron and his proper successors enjoyed the dignity of the high priesthood. But the office had become subject to the corruptions of the age. Annas had been deposed by the Romans, but virtually retained his power, the Jews not assenting to his degradation. Caiaphas, moreover, was his son-in-law, and hence, in popular language, there were two high priests; a singular circumstance, and serving still further to mark the period of our history.

That the word of God came unto John, is an additional proof of his high prophetic character. It is also an indication of the methods adopted in the economy of heaven. Thus, though John was filled with the Spirit, even from his

mother's womb, he received an especial call, and was wrought upon by a particular Divine influence, when he was to go forth, and announce that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Luke gives a fuller version of the words of Isaiah, but he omits the graphic account which Matthew affords of the Baptist himself; "his raiment was of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey." However much we rejoice in possessing the scholarly, the full, historical Gospel of St. Luke, who can fail to perceive, were it only from this one trait of St. Matthew's narrative, that a vast amount of interesting information would have been lost had we been left dependent upon any single Gospel?

VERSES 7—18.

The slight differences in the reports of John the Baptist's preaching may be easily accounted for. In the case of Matthew, it passed through the mind of a Jew: in that of Luke, it was subjected to the siftings of a Gentile's comprehension: but in the latter, as strictly as in the former, enough is preserved to us to render the preaching of John a living branch of the Divine word. Let the report of either Evangelist be read with even moderate earnestness, and the corrupt, the self-deceiving, the proud and unbelieving heart, cannot but feel the force of the awful words which pointed to the axe laid to the root of the trees: and to him who should burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

VERSES 19—23.

We here again miss the mention of some particulars in the history of John; but there is a peculiar expressiveness in the statement, that of all the instances of Herod's depravity, the imprisonment of John was the greatest. In the other Evangelists, the spirit is described as descending like a dove; but

St. Luke greatly strengthens the comparison, by adding the words, "in a bodily shape."

VERSES 24—38.

Great difficulties have been found in comparing the genealogy given by Matthew, with that in the present Gospel. If irreconcilable, the former, perhaps, ought to be regarded as of the higher authority. But the differences between them are, probably, more apparent than real. In such a long series of family names, and where individuals were often designated by more than one appellation, genealogical tables may present slight discrepancies, and yet agree in all important points. In the case of our Lord's genealogy, the only object for which it is introduced into the Gospels, is to shew his descent along the line of the chosen seed. This being clearly proved, we may safely leave these genealogical lists, as belonging to national annals with which we have little immediate concern.

CHAPTER IV.

VERSES 1—15.

The accounts from which St. Luke derived his materials for the history of the temptation, were, doubtless, full and well accredited; and his narrative seems, in one point, to be more precise in the arrangement of particulars, than that of Matthew. It is difficult to suppose that Satan conveyed our Lord from the wilderness to the pinnacle of the temple, and then brought him back to the wilderness to try him with another temptation proper to that scene. The order in which the temptations follow in Luke has no difficulty of this kind. Two of them were fitted for the solitude of the wilderness: they failed; and then another, of a totally different kind, was to be attempted; and the wilderness was left for Jerusalem

and the Temple. St. Matthew was satisfied with giving the grand particulars of the temptation. We rejoice in the precise exactness of one Evangelist when compared with another, in certain parts of their narratives. One exhibits this particularity in one way, and another in another: but in no case does the pointed exactness of any one of the four Evangelists invalidate the general truthfulness of the other three. A close correspondence in all important matters, with a witness confessedly trustworthy, gives a weight to the common narrative which no slight discrepancy can ever shake. It is not unworthy of remark, that while Luke omits the mention of the beautiful incident, with which Matthew closes his narrative, "and angels came and ministered unto him," he adds a circumstance which Matthew omits, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee." There may have been an original identity in these two incidents. The ministry of angels, and the more than common manifestation of the power of the Holy Ghost, are, no doubt, often combined.

VERSES 16—29.

It is evident that our Lord did not go immediately to Nazareth, on leaving the wilderness; it being distinctly stated in the preceding verse that "he taught in the synagogues," that is, in the whole circle of Galilee. This must have occupied a considerable period; and hence we learn, that it was not the design of Luke to write a chronological account of our Lord's labours; but to describe them generally, taking fuller and more particular note of such incidents as seemed to him most important. The discourse which our Lord addressed to the people of Nazareth is of great interest, not only in itself, but as affording an example of his style of preaching in the synagogue. Taking it as such, there seems to have been a remarkable difference between his discourses in the synagogue, and those delivered in the open air: upon

the mountain, in the market-place, or by the sea-shore. In the former, ancient scripture, the law or the prophets, formed the groundwork of the sermon; in the latter, some parable, or some object in nature, or circumstance connected with it, gave the main feature to the discourse. Strictly considered, however, we have but a very brief report of the sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth. Its character is chiefly to be gathered from the statement of the impression which it made, "All wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth." That which follows was not a part of the sermon; but consists of remarks, addressed to those who, probably, either by their looks, or their whispers, betrayed what was passing in their hearts. It is not so obvious to us, as it was to the Nazarenes, why our Lord quoted the examples of Elijah and Elisha, as illustrative of his own case. He had been sent to vast multitudes, and in every direction; whereas, according to his discourse, each of the prophets had been a minister of mercy to only a single individual. But why had their prophetic power been thus limited? Simply because of the disbelief and wickedness of their countrymen, to whom they might have been universally messengers of peace. Being rejected, it was only here and there, that they dispensed a blessing. And so with our Lord. Being despised by the great mass of those whom he came to save, he restricted the exercise of his gracious power to the few who, like the widow of Sarepta, or Naaman, the Syrian, were ready to humble themselves, and repent and believe. The wrath of the Nazarenes proves sufficiently well the piercing sharpness of his words. A preacher of truth may learn the success of his appeal to men's consciences, either by the happier signs of conversion, or by the sad, though not less certain, indications of resentment.

VERSES 30—37.

No express intimation is given that our Lord put forth a miraculous power to deliver himself on this occasion : but that he must have done so, appears from the very circumstances of the case. The infuriated crowd which had forced him to the edge of the precipice, was not likely to become suddenly quiet, and allow him, of their own accord, to pass peaceably through the midst of them. How noble a proof is given here of his untiring fortitude and charity ! He only leaves the synagogue of Nazareth, to hasten to that of Caper-naum ; but there it is expressly said, “his word was with power.” That it was so, appears from the terror with which the unclean spirits heard, and fled from, his voice. Nor ought it to be unobserved, that his authority, as well as his power, is spoken of. The latter word signifies the force with which his word acted : the former intimates that he had a full right to exercise that force. But in both cases, something more was accomplished than the cure of demoniacs. Sinners were converted : the power of evil in the heart was broken : and penitents felt that they were delivered from their iniquities by the faith with which his grace inspired them.

VERSES 38—44.

If Peter, at this time, was almost a stranger to our Lord, the miracle wrought upon his wife’s mother, was an earnest of future benefits : if he was already known as a faithful disciple, the miracle was a beautiful proof of our Lord’s friendship. According to the tenor of the narrative, there seems reason to suppose that such was the crowd of applicants for mercy, that the whole of the night was passed in answering their prayers ; and that, therefore, as soon as the day began to dawn, our Lord left the town to gain an interval of repose, before he resumed his work in other cities. The repetition of the statement, that he preached in the synagogues

of Galilee, may be expressly intended to shew how long and carefully he instructed the people of that region.

CHAPTER V.

VERSES 1—11.

The call of the Apostles is one of the most important circumstances in the history of the Gospel; and every incident connected with it throws light upon our Lord's proceeding in the appointment of his ministers. If we look particularly at the present narrative, it will appear sufficiently evident, that Jesus was well acquainted with the men whom he was about to call. But the call was preceded by a trial of simple obedience, "thrust out a little from the land;" this was followed by another, "launch out into the deep;" and here a somewhat higher degree of submission was required. It was rendered; and then came the wonder which bred faith, with all its attendant emotions; astonishment, awe, and overpowering humility. These again were followed by a blessing, "Fear not;" and the fishermen having brought their ships to land, that is, having performed the last duty of their humble occupation, left all to follow Christ. In every step of this progress, we see something which may illustrate God's dispensations in the call and appointment of his most faithful ministers.

VERSES 12—15.

So many were the miracles wrought in behalf of miserable and outcast lepers, that it is impossible to determine whether the cases mentioned by one Evangelist are identical with those described by another. In most instances there would be the same earnest cry for help; the same ready display of mercy; and a corresponding direction as to the observance of all the proper demands of the law. The precision with which these

points are noted by separate Evangelists, shews their importance, and their consequent claim upon our attention.

VERSES 16—26.

The retirement of our Lord is not so often mentioned without a particular design. At whatever intervals, or wherever sought, periods of solitary reflection and prayer should be regarded by the disciple of Christ as a part of his necessary discipline. Our obligation to labour honestly for ourselves and those about us, and the difficulty which may thence exist, to our finding either leisure, or liberty, for the exercise of quiet devotion, may often fill us with sadness, knowing that however our hearts may yearn to follow, in this respect, the example of Jesus, it is but rarely allowed us to do so. Still, this, in almost every case, may be done more frequently than it is. A rigid economy of time; a watchful attention to opportunities; and, important above all, such a management of the mind and heart, that place and outward circumstances may be subordinate to their habits of reflection,—these things rightly considered, will shew even the busiest man that he is not without the means of cultivating the graces of his soul by retired meditation. If we may suppose that, at least, some of the Scribes and Pharisees, who felt the healing power of our Lord's discourse, beheld the cure of the paralytic, a very striking proof was given of the change wrought in their minds. According to their old habits of thought, they angrily questioned our Lord's right to pronounce pardon on a sinner; but when they beheld the miracle, they did not resist conviction, or attribute the wonder to some unholy power, or purpose, as many of their brethren would have done. The divinity of the healing grace imparted to them now asserted its dominion in their hearts; and they joined the simple multitude in glorifying God in Christ.

VERSES 27—32.

The call of Matthew, or, as he is here named, Levi, is recorded by the first three Evangelists with such close correspondence, that it ought to be viewed as involving points of especial interest. One of these is to be found in the fact, that he belonged to a class of men, from which it was least probable, that Jesus would choose an Apostle. No surprise might be felt at his selecting men without wealth or learning for his followers ; or those whose occupations were humble and laborious. Amid all their sins and degrading corruptions, the Jews do not appear to have engendered any prejudice against the common handicrafts, or other modes of gaining bread, which, in later times, have been supposed to unfit a man for the higher exercises of thought. But Matthew's employment, though leading to wealth, was a degrading one ; and our Lord, in calling him from the receipt of custom, and placing him among the twelve, exercised his authority with a much more startling independence than when he took Peter and John from their boats and their fishing nets. He taught a great lesson when he thus acted ; and that which followed was but an application of the principle displayed in the call of a publican to the Apostleship. The word and the grace of Jesus have power to convert sinners : and what should limit the working of a power which is thus able to overcome the greatest of all distinctions, and bring the sinner into the condition of the righteous ? The call of Matthew was the preliminary to a full and clear announcement of the main purpose of the Gospel.

VERSES 33—39.

The repetition of this brief discourse on the subject of fasting, may also be regarded as indicating the importance of a careful distinction between ordinances proper to a state of

legal bondage, or to periods of humiliation, and those which peculiarly characterize the new covenant. A confusion between the two, however valuable each in its place, should be anxiously avoided. The last verse contains a remark not given by the other Evangelists; but it very pointedly describes the prejudiced feelings under which the majority of the company listened to our Lord. They had, as yet, no taste for the new, spiritual truth, which he wished to teach them, in place of the old notions engrafted in their minds, more by tradition, than by the law of God.

CHAPTER VI.

VERSES 1—11.

The second Sabbath after the first, is a peculiar expression; and its meaning was so immediately dependent upon customs, merely Jewish and temporal, that the earliest Christian commentators could only guess at its interpretation. In all probability, some Sabbath had been particularly distinguished in the larger accounts, from which Luke drew his present narrative. Had he given the history unabridged, we should have seen what the former Sabbath was, and why it was made the mark whereby to note the exact period of the occurrence here described; the second Sabbath after the first, meaning the Sabbath which fell immediately after that before noted for some particular event. In St. Matthew's account, no interval is marked between this Sabbath, and that on which the miracle next described took place. But St. Luke appears to have had in view the sequence of three Sabbaths rendered remarkable by important occurrences, two of them requiring a more particular record from their connection with the lesson of permanent interest to which they gave occasion.

VERSES 12—19.

We do not find that our Lord exercised any especial devotion when he first called around him Peter, Andrew, and the rest of those disciples, whom he afterwards intrusted with the highest office in his Church. It may, therefore, be presumed that their original call did not necessarily involve their appointment to the Apostleship. This depended upon the answer which the Father should give to the prayers of Jesus, who thus illustrated his own doctrine, “the Son can do nothing but what he seeth the Father do.” And so important was it to the furtherance of his designs that holy and faithful men should be given him, that all the powers and sentiments of his human nature, were aroused to the uttermost, when he came to ask this blessing of his Father. Hence it is, that we are emphatically told, that he continued in prayer the whole of the night preceding the call of the Apostles. It was in answer to the supplications then offered up, that twelve men were given him, eleven proving effectual ministers of his Gospel, and the twelfth, though a traitor, becoming one of the most active agents in bringing to pass the object of his incarnation. The season of this great event was one altogether remarkable for displays of the Divine presence. Multitudes assembled, attracted by the fame of Jesus, and as his power went forth, it healed their diseases; calmed their troubled souls, and expelled the demons which had held them in subjection. It was a fitting time for the publication of the new principles of morality and holiness which were henceforth to be the guide of God’s people; and full of awe and love must have been the hearts of those who had just before felt his power, and were now about to be illuminated by his wisdom.

VERSES 20—38.

The various portions of the Sermon here given, correspond so exactly to the principal parts of the Sermon on the Mount, that St. Luke's can only be considered as a less complete and orderly report of the discourse more fully given by St. Matthew. But from passages inserted among the fragments of the principal Sermon, St. Luke appears to have intended to give, not the substance of one discourse so much as a general abstract of our Lord's teaching. Humbleness of spirit; peaceableness, and charity, are plainly taught in both cases; and the inference which Jesus himself draws, is, in each instance, given with the same distinctness. Mere outward homage will not avail with him who came to resist and conquer sin in all its forms. He, who calls Jesus Lord, must do what Jesus commands; and when the same spirit may be discovered in every precept which he utters, the variety of language, or expression, still leaves the law, itself, in all its force and authority. Thus, though we do not read in St. Matthew, immediately after the blessings pronounced upon the poor, the meek, the sorrowing, a denunciation of woe upon those of contrary dispositions, we cannot fail to learn from the tenor of the Gospel, that such will be the fruit of pride and unholiness. Compare the two reports, and great as their difference in arrangement, their substantial agreement is proportionally striking.

VERSES 39—49.

A parable, as here spoken of, is little more than a mere comparison. But may we not conjecture, that our Lord did not stop with the words, which it was sufficient to preserve in the written Gospel? Is it not very possible, that he did really deliver a parable on the subject which prompted his question? The blind leading the blind was a spectacle, per-

haps, not uncommon in those days ; and some notable instance of mishap may have furnished our Lord with the materials of a story highly graphic for his immediate hearers, though not so fitted for later disciples. The connection between the rebuke on self-deceit, and the remark which follows, is not immediately apparent. We do not see how the mote, or the beam, in the eye, can illustrate the difference between the good and the bad tree. It is not, indeed, at all certain, that the two comparisons were made, one after the other, at the same time, as they are here written. St. Luke may have inserted them for their worth and pointedness, without respect to what part of a discourse they formed. But supposing their strict connection with each other, then it may be suggested, that our Lord intended to remind his hearers, that it is not the slight defect in another's character which ought to engage our attention, but the great and general results of his state of heart. If his life be wicked, he is wicked in himself : if holy, the root of holiness must be in him. But as the ungenerous severity which delights in censure is often accompanied with the worst corruptions and deformities of personal character, so it becomes us on every occasion, when we look severely at others, to try ourselves by the plainest and directest rules of inquiry. And here is one of the best. We believe ourselves to be superior to others. Are our lives better ? We give ourselves credit for greater riches of understanding. Is our conversation richer in all the evidence of goodness, wisdom, and charity ? The noble simile which follows, may be regarded as moveable to every page of the Gospel. It is the sublime and elegant poetical form of the precept : "If ye know these things, happy are ye, if ye do them."

CHAPTER VII.

VERSES 1—10.

It is interesting to mark the notes of character incidentally given in the simple narratives of Scripture. Thus we have here a Roman soldier, whose merits had advanced him to an important military station. We learn, at the same time, that he was of the kindest and most affectionate nature, the anxiety which he felt for his sick servant, shewing how readily he entered into the duties and sympathies of a home. Again, his profession had called him into a foreign country, and placed him among a people, whose religion was altogether different from that in which he had been educated. He learnt the nature of their belief. The knowledge of the one true God was communicated to him. Rejoicing in the light which thus shone upon his mind, he manifested his thankfulness by the best means in his power. He gathered around him the most devout of the people from whom he had derived instruction ; he built them a house of prayer ; and so conducted himself, that he won their affections, and made them readily attentive to his wish. But he had not sat down mechanically satisfied with the elementary knowledge which he had acquired. The living principle of a Divine hope had been planted in his heart. He desired to know more and more of God : to draw nearer and nearer to him ; and when he heard of Jesus, he felt that new and wonderful possibilities of advancement for his soul were being gradually revealed. No pride or hardness of heart opposed his growth in faith. He believed in Jesus. But his humility was equal to his faith. He dare not approach the Master but by the intervention of friends ; and when Jesus was actually approaching his house, his faith and humility so strengthened each other, that though he dare not let the Lord enter a place where he had about him signs

of command, an appearance of pomp and grandeur, which, to his simple heart, now seemed unfitted for a suppliant sinner, yet his belief was so intense, that he knew it was quite enough for Jesus to utter a word, at once to restore his dying servant. Our Lord saw the faith, all the more excellent and remarkable for the thorough humility with which it was accompanied. Whatever his subsequent conduct towards the centurion, he would not now disturb the beautiful moral exhibition of such a character. He did not force himself upon the heathen's hearth; but, putting forth his almighty power, wrought the desired miracle, and left the scene of this wonder, marked by circumstances which render it one of the most striking in the records of the Gospel.

VERSES 11—17.

It is highly probable that there are correspondences between this miracle and that of Lazarus, which, though not, at first, obvious, it may be useful and interesting to consider. From the circumstance, that many of his disciples, and a throng of people followed our Lord, it seems that something wonderful was expected to occur at Nain. That little town was so short a distance from Capernaum, that whatever occurred in the one was likely to be soon known in the other. The people of Nain were, doubtless, as familiar as the people of Capernaum with the miracles of Jesus, and there must have been many in the latter town well acquainted with the every day life, with the joys and sorrows, of the inhabitants of Nain. The widow had evidently many sympathising friends. They were not likely to keep her case unknown to Jesus. He had, in all probability, been solicited again and again to go and heal the young man. Nor is it to be supposed that, if a Roman officer would send to him to come and restore a sick servant, a woman, whose only son was dying, would neglect to cry to him for help. But if this was done, why did not Jesus

go and heal the sufferer at once? For the same reason which induced him to delay in the case of Lazarus. While the minds of those who sought his compassion were in suspense, they were also inquiring, and meditating upon the nature of his power, and questioning whether he could accomplish their wish. Had not intervals of this kind occurred between the prayer, and the fulfilment of the petition, less would have been known of Jesus. The reflection upon mercy, already exercised, would never have created the intense thought aroused by the question, whether it would or could be exercised. Even this consideration would be sufficient to account for the delay. But our Lord desired to give an instance of the highest exercise of his power; and it should be observed, that he wrought the two miracles, which most publicly and strikingly illustrated his character, as the resurrection and the life, at the two extremities of the line of his ministry. The raising of Lazarus, at Bethany, however described, could never have produced the same effect on the minds of the people of Galilee, as the corresponding miracle at Nain. When the end, so generally important to his ministry, had been secured, he let the power of his mercy exercise its full force; and the objects upon which it was employed were, as in the case of Lazarus, the best fitted to awaken compassion. The mother was a widow; the son, an only son: and, if any thing could reconcile a departed and happy soul to a return to earth, and to a re-encounter with all the labours and cares of a life like the present, it would be the knowledge that its return was a blessing to a lone and broken-hearted mother. This is a consideration worthy, perhaps, of attention. It applies, with an almost equal degree of force, to the case of Lazarus: in both instances, the person recalled to earth having, as it were, a compensation in the happiness which he saw beaming from the eyes of those to whom his death had been the greatest of sorrows. Even the innocent child of

Jairus may have been thus satisfied to leave her first delights in Paradise, when she heard the joyous voice of her father welcoming her return.

VERSES 18—23.

Though St. Luke does not appear to have adopted a strict chronological arrangement of his materials, it was, doubtless, at the point, when the fame of Jesus was most widely spread, that the incident here recorded of John and his disciples took place. We may form many surmises why John sent to enquire of Jesus, "Art thou he?" Improbable as it may seem, it is yet possible, that the mind of the Baptist had its seasons of depression, when perplexities, and saddening fears would, for the moment, darken its hopes, and even bewilder the operation of faith and knowledge. It is not quite certain, that our Lord did not especially allude to this, his degree of weakness, when he said, that "the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than he." The trial, indeed, supposing that there was such a one, would only be for the passing hour; for, although God might permit this, as in the case of other saints, for particular and gracious purposes, he would, assuredly, not let the light of such a man go out in darkness. But by far the simpler way of accounting for the proceeding, is to ascribe it to John's desire to make his disciples personally acquainted with Jesus, and to give them an opportunity of beholding some of his wonderful works. Our Lord appears to have fully understood the intention of the message, and to have answered it accordingly, by an appeal not only to what he had done, but to what he was then ready to perform.

VERSES 24—35.

That the account of John the Baptist, thus given by our Lord, must have made a very deep impression upon the minds of his hearers, appears from the literal agreement in the re-

parts of Matthew and Luke ; but the latter adds an important remark, as to the manner in which men's characters might be tested by their acceptance or rejection of John's ministry. Thus one class justified God by repenting of sin, and so acknowledging the righteousness of his laws, confirming this, their repentance, by its proper sign ; while the opposite class, rejecting both the call to repentance, and the offered means of grace, despised the counsel of God ; which, had they humbled themselves, might have been converted into a manifestation of mercy, rather than of wrath, and have led them to salvation instead of involving them in everlasting ruin. The simpler way of considering the passage would be to take the "being baptized with the baptism of John," as the title or description of those who justified God. As the sentence stands, it seems to intimate that the people who repented, justified God by being baptized ; whereas the real meaning is, that, having been baptized, they then justified God by confessing with profounder reverence and love the majesty of his law. Never was conduct more inconsistent than that of the men who rejected John because of the necessary severity of his life and doctrine, and then despised Jesus because his ministry was marked by the opposite qualities. Happily, wisdom is always justified in the conduct of her true children, the most different course, in different cases, being alike fitted to promote the objects for which they are raised up.

VERSES 36—50.

Had we a full account, not only of all which Jesus, himself, said and did, but of the various proofs of affection which he received from his followers, the instance of humble and devout love here rendered would be seen but as one among many. It was, doubtless, selected for especial record, on account of its giving rise to a lesson of equal beauty and importance. Simon, though a sinner, did not feel the burden

of his iniquities, and, therefore, could not know the worth of a Saviour ; he thought he owed little to God ; but the poor weeping woman penetrated, by the very force of grief, the mystery of redemption. She knew what Jesus had, in purpose, already accomplished for her soul ; and she loved much, because her hope and feeling of deliverance were in proportion to her previous despair.

CHAPTER VIII.

VERSES 1—3.

It was from simple devotion to Jesus that the women here spoken of followed in his train ; and when they ministered unto him of their substance, the same feeling operated in their hearts as that which led to the instance of affection described in the preceding chapter. But it should not be forgotten, that, adding to the twelve apostles some of the other disciples, there was now with Jesus a considerable company ; and that though it was for his sake that these faithful women took such long and painful journeys, the wants and conveniences of the whole party formed the object of their daily care. It was Jesus whom they served ; but they served him in ministering to his followers ; and, no doubt, the company was indebted for much of its order and means of support to the arrangements of these earliest female converts.

VERSES 4—15.

To no class of people, whatever their condition, or in whatever age they may be living, can this parable be an unneeded lesson. Let but the trifler with his Christianity, only lay the first verse to his heart, and he will learn at once how it is that he knows so little, and cares less, about the religion in which he has been brought up. He will see that the seed of Divine truth has never yet penetrated, even skin deep, into

his heart ; that it was lost as soon as scattered upon the surface of his thoughtless nature ; and if he be capable of alarm, or even of shame, he may thus be led to listen, in future, with somewhat more of reverence, to that word which is the seed of life, as well as of truth and wisdom. Equally profitable will such a consideration prove to the man of the world, in all the varieties of worldly character. It may be care, or it may be success ; it may be the restlessness of a nervous spirit, or the strong pre-occupations of determined labour, which swallow up every higher affection of the soul. But let the man, who is conscious of having occasionally felt the value of the Gospel, and then lost the impression, consider carefully the second and third comparisons in this parable, and he will be startled to see how clearly his case has been depicted ; how well his sin, and folly, and inconsistency are known to his Divine master ; and how absolutely necessary it is, if he look for salvation, that the precious seed should be more carefully watered by Divine grace. Nor less valuable, in another respect, is the concluding section of the parable. When the earnest and grateful believer discovers that his life and conversation, notwithstanding all their defects, afford frequent illustrations of the power of the Gospel, how can he fail to rejoice in the conviction, that, as it was God who prepared the soil of his heart, and thus made it good for the good seed, so, by the same gracious influence, he may look forward to the time when he shall bring forth fruit, not only thirty fold, but sixty, or even a hundred fold, and that to perfection.

VERSES 16—21.

We may regard this passage as containing our Lord's intimation of the value of the truth which he was now communicating. It was as a torch given into the hands of his disciples, first for their own good, but then for that of others,

and certainly not to be extinguished, or concealed, when it had served a temporary purpose. That which was at present taught with comparative secrecy, that is, to a small company, and in an obscure district, was, by-and-bye, to be proclaimed to all the world. And woe to those who, being intrusted with the truth, neglect to consider the purpose for which it was revealed ! The remark which our Lord made, at the same time, in reference to his mother and his brethren, was intended for the same object ; to impress, that is, upon the minds of all who heard him, the exceeding value of his word, and the power which it has to bring those who receive it into immediate relationship with himself.

VERSES 22—25.

It is not to be concluded, in any instance, where only one Evangelist records a particular occurrence, that that occurrence is an unimportant one ; but it may reasonably be understood, that circumstances described particularly by three of the Evangelists, are intended for especial study ; and ought to be regarded as essential to a complete view of our Lord's character and labours. In the cases immediately before us, there are obvious reasons for their being carefully, and more than once, recorded. It is peculiarly interesting to know, that Jesus has a most entire control over the elements of the natural world ; that winds and waves are subject to his sway ; and that the power of his word must be felt even where it cannot be understood.

VERSES 26—36.

Here, again, we have one of those proofs of our Lord's irresistible might, which can never be contemplated without awe and thankfulness. Demoniac power was exercised on its miserable victims, with very different degrees of virulence. The present was one of the worst cases. Driven from the city

to the tombs, the wretched sufferer there yielded himself up to the terrors of his tormentor, and expressed the reality of the possession, as well as his agony, in acts of superhuman violence. It was in one of the outbursts of his fury that our Lord encountered him. But the fury was driven back upon himself: he lay prostrate before Jesus. The expressions of maniac rage were changed into a humble and pitiful supplication. "Torment me not." That prayer, wonderful and mysterious the mercy, was granted; and the vanquished spirits felt the power rather than the vengeance of the Lord.

VERSES 37—40.

The Gadarenes seem to have besought Jesus to depart from them simply because they feared him. He suffered no insult at their hands; and the man whom he had healed was not taken away, as would probably have been the case, had an ill feeling prevailed, but was expressly told to proclaim the history of his cure. Jesus, doubtless, saw that the excessive terror which prevailed among the people at the moment, would be unfavourable to his personal ministry. He, therefore, withdrew; but not to leave the miracle which he had wrought without its proper fruits.

VERSES 41—48.

In the miracles above described, the power of Jesus is the most conspicuous element in action; in those which follow, his surpassing mercy and tenderness are chiefly observable. By an earnest contemplation of the former we feel convinced that we may, and ought, to trust in Him, whatever the difficulties or terrors of our case; but the study of such miracles as the present, inspires us with an assurance superior to the convictions of reason; and encourages the afflicted to seek Him, as if the "Come unto me," became more and more audible, the fainter and more sorrowful the heart.

VERSES 49—56.

The slight differences in the accounts of this, and the preceding miracle, will, themselves, furnish a careful reader with useful topics for reflection. Take, for example, St. Matthew's report of the words of Jairus, when he first addressed our Lord. Instead of its being merely said that he besought him, we have his full, intense confession of faith in Jesus: the one Evangelist being satisfied with the fact that he believed; the other shewing how ardent was his confidence. Matthew, on the other hand, tells us nothing about the woman who had the issue of blood, except that she had been so afflicted for twelve years; but Luke shews us how she had become poor and destitute by her long distress. In each case, and in similar instances, the additional point of the narrative has its own proper meaning, and will often teach a lesson of peculiar force, because appearing as a new, or hitherto unobserved, object in a picture, otherwise familiar to the eye.

CHAPTER IX.

VERSES 1—6.

Matthew's corresponding account of this first mission of the Apostles, is much more complete than that here given, and that of Mark. Matthew was, himself, deeply interested in the occurrence. He heard the charge, and was a partaker of the grace and power with which it was accompanied. No word in such a charge, no incident in such an event could be forgotten by those whom they so immediately concerned.

VERSES 7—9.

Herod's perplexity and alarm were naturally increased by the growing fame of Jesus. He could not fail to perceive, that the warnings which had been given by John the Baptist,

were, in some mysterious manner, closely connected with the prodigies wrought by this new preacher of righteousness. Those with whom he conversed, wealthy and luxurious courtiers, knew as little of the truth as he did. They were satisfied with reports which just served to excite wonder and curiosity ; and it is a trait in Herod's character worth noticing, that he was not contented with any of these vague surmises, but wished to see Jesus. Whatever his subsequent designs, it is not improbable that his first emotions on listening to the accounts given him of Jesus, were those of simple awe ; and that he desired to see this wonderful person, face to face, either that he might dissipate the terror which was beginning to oppress him, at the recollection of John, or that he might learn some truth which would serve to calm the general agitation of his mind. Far as he was from genuine repentance, the man who had so trembled at the announcement of a judgment to come, and who had experienced bitter remorse at the consequences of a rash oath, was not likely to be influenced by motives, altogether sinister, when he first expressed a wish to see Jesus.

VERSES 10—17.

The Bethsaida here named, is supposed to have been, not the Bethsaida on the western side of the lake of Gennesereth, but a little town to the east of Jordan, in the tetrarchy of Philip, and where Jesus and his disciples might find themselves safe from any immediate disturbance from Herod, whose authority was confined to Galilee. The anxiety of the people to hear his discourses, and their faith in his power to heal their sicknesses, are strikingly shewn in the eagerness with which they looked for his re-appearance, whenever He sought retirement. But still more strikingly does an incident like the present prove the perfect tenderness, the entire forgetfulness of self, which marked the character of Jesus.

He needed rest; he yearned, humanly, for opportunities of quiet devotion; and it was at this season, more particularly, that he wished to be alone with his Apostles: but his solitude was rudely invaded by the anxious multitude; thousands upon thousands pressed around him; and, instead of repose, he found occasion for the highest exercise of his power. He had to teach: he had to heal the sick; and then he had to feed the hungry. And all this he did. There was no excuse on the score of weariness. His desire of solitude; or pleasant communion with his followers, was not allowed to interfere with the call of duty and of compassion; and while we look at Jesus, as the Son of Man, as subject to like infirmities with ourselves, we cannot but regard this sort of triumph over all mental, and all bodily, reluctances to exertion, as the highest of all possible proofs of benevolence, with the single exception of the suffering on the cross. Who, with this consideration in his mind, can doubt the readiness of Jesus to listen to the representation of his wants; or the willingness of Jesus to relieve them?

VERSES 18—27.

Two circumstances, in this passage, ought to be especially noticed, as illustrative of the question put by our Lord. The one is, that he had been praying; the other, that he was alone with his disciples. His prayer may have embraced topics not quite intelligible to his followers. The very fact that he prayed as he did may have startled them; interrupted the workings of their faith; and perplexed their views of his nature and office. But those around him, at this moment, were pre-eminently his disciples; and it was necessary that they should be led, as far as was now possible, into the knowledge of his twofold nature; and that, while they beheld, with awe, mysterious intimations of his Godhead, they should not lose sight of the necessities of his humanity. And so with

the reverse. If he prayed, and they thence learnt that he was indeed man; equally necessary was it that they should be aroused to the conviction of his Deity. Here, then, we have the reason why, immediately after his praying, being alone with his disciples, he asked them, "Whom, say the people that I am?" The faith of Peter was eminently calculated to awaken the loftiest hopes; but faith, by its very nature, outruns knowledge, with all its sedate and humbling lessons: and hence the check immediately given to the aspiring thoughts of the disciples. Before the crown; the cross. Some were then listening to Jesus who did not die till long after his Gospel had been established, and with it the kingdom of God, in the hearts of multitudes of regenerate and loving children.

VERSES 28—36.

The transfiguration concentrates many points of Divine history. It brings to view the grand train of events, and characters, connected with the Mosaic dispensation: it reminds us of the intermingling operations of the Spirit, working and speaking by the ministry of the prophets: it shews us Christ in the circle of a blended humility and glory; and we feel, when duly impressed with the grandeur of the scene, and the sublime intention of the mystery, how good it is for us to be admitted to such a contemplation; and to be made the heirs of a kingdom so wonderfully foreshadowed.

VERSES 37—50.

St. Luke describes all that is essential to the miracle here recorded, in so far as it affords a proof of our Lord's power and compassion; but both the preceding Evangelists tell us, what was the impression made on the minds of the Apostles, when they found how readily their Master could effect that which they had in vain attempted. The warning, however,

which St. Luke reports as immediately following the miracle, embodies the substance of the entire conversation between our Lord and his disciples. By his first rebuke, "O faithless and perverse generation," he indicated the necessity of faith, and of whatsoever discipline may be best fitted to subdue the pride of the human soul : and when he here says, "Let these sayings sink into your ears," he brings the whole power of his Divine instruction to bear upon the understanding, the hearts and spirits, of all who engage, and hope to prosper, in his service. It is evident from the two circumstances, the mention of which immediately follows, that the disciples still needed the chastisements, as well as the lessons, of Divine wisdom. Even when but just humbled at the discovery of their helplessness, they could dispute about pre-eminence ; and at the moment when a timid, retiring, believer in Jesus was proving his faith, by working the very sort of miracles in which they had so signally failed, their pride rose again to its full height, and they, as foolishly as uncharitably, desired Jesus to prevent another from doing that which they could not do, because their graces were less active than the stranger's. Our Lord's answer was founded upon the obvious principle, that one who casts out devils in his name, and for his sake, cannot be his enemy, though outward circumstances may accidentally separate him from the company of believers.

VERSES 51—56.

A traveller from Galilee to Jerusalem, passing through the heart of Samaria, must have often had to encounter many curious enquiries, and sometimes insult. The Samaritans, since the time of the captivity, had vainly supposed that they were an injured people, and that their imperfect, and half-idolatrous, notions of religion, were compatible with the union to which they aspired with the Jews. Far as the latter were from genuine spirituality, they knew and worshipped the only

one God. But a temple had been built on mount Gerizim, by the son of a High Priest, who had forfeited his honour and religion, by marrying the daughter of the heathen governor of Samaria. In that temple, a spurious worship, a bad imitation of the services in the temple at Jerusalem, was carried on. This tended greatly to increase the schism between the two people; and, whenever a traveller was seen with his face set towards Jerusalem, and whose object, it evidently was, to reach that city in time for some of the grand festivals, the zealous Samaritan considered his religion insulted, for why might not the devout stranger as well wait, and offer up his sacrifice in the temple on mount Gerizim, as in that on mount Zion? Our Lord understood perfectly the state of mind which led the Samaritans to oppose his entrance into their village; and that of his disciples, who would have resented the insult by fire from heaven. Neither the one nor the other knew of what spirit they were. Men do not willingly, or consciously, obey the devil.

VERSES 57—62.

It would be interesting to know what were the thoughts which more directly impelled this stranger to determine on following Jesus. They, probably, partook equally of the character of conviction and excitement. Our Lord did not reject the convert thus suddenly coming upon his path; but he warned him against the error to which such hasty determinations are exposed: he reminded him of the possibility of his having neglected to count the cost of following a master utterly wanting in worldly wealth, and the means of worldly enjoyment. To shew him how likely it was that he had not fully considered all the difficulties attending his sudden resolution, Jesus made, as it were, two experiments upon those who seem to have been some time in his company. Thus he called one, and said, "Follow me." An excuse was

immediately made: there was something to be done which demanded delay, before the invitation could be accepted. In the case of another of the by-standers, a free offer of service was given: but just as Jesus might have been opening his lips to assent to the proposal, the convert hesitated, and drew back: there was something to be done at home. The stranger received a very powerful lesson from these instances of doubt and hesitation; and the wisdom of Jesus is strikingly illustrated by the method which he thus employed to awaken thought and consideration in the minds of those who desired to follow him.

C H A P T E R X.

VERSES 1—16.

This appointment of the seventy other disciples, is one of the most important events in the New Testament history. We learn from it, more than from almost any other circumstance in the narrative, what was the progress of the Gospel during our Lord's sojourn upon earth. There were now eighty-two ministers, regularly set apart to preach his word. It must have been a large number of disciples which could furnish such a proportion of ministers; men, whom Jesus himself saw fit to call, and to entrust with the unsearchable riches of his truth. The field of labour, and the probabilities of success, were, doubtless, proportioned to the number of preachers; and from these considerations, it may be concluded, not only that the diffusion of the Gospel was very general throughout the country, but that it was carefully and deeply planted in the hearts of unknown multitudes. The instructions given to the seventy were the same as those which the twelve received. Their duties, their wants, and trials were the same; and they were, therefore, to be guided by the same rules, and supported by the same providence

and all-sustaining grace. Chorazin and Bethsaida, both in the neighbourhood of Capernaum, had shared with that city the mighty privilege of our Lord's frequent presence. The impenitence and unconverted state of the mass of the inhabitants were awful proofs of reprobation.

VERSES 17—20.

It was natural that the seventy should rejoice at the success of their mission. They had accomplished, at least, one of the main objects for which the Lord had sent them forth. Not only had they proclaimed his name, but they had forced the most unwilling hearers to acknowledge that there was a power in that name which made devils tremble. Jesus knew that such would be the result of the gifts with which he endowed them. His eye was upon their path. He had seen Satan shaken from his throne in the air; and he was ready to bestow still larger powers upon them, as they should continue to shew increasing fidelity and devotion. But they were still only at the beginning of their course. Like children, they were dazzled and delighted with the wonderful. When they better knew both their calling and their privileges, as servants of Christ, it was not that they could work miracles, but that their names were written in heaven, that they counted themselves happy.

VERSES 21—24.

The simplicity with which the disciples yielded to every emotion of their hearts; the mode in which they described what they had done, and expressed their thoughts of the future, furnished our Lord with ample occasions for speaking of them as babes. He rejoiced that no pride or sophistry interfered in their souls with the workings of grace. What they knew, they ascribed wholly to the teaching and the influence of their master. Had the same things been revealed

to the wise and prudent, it would soon have been questioned whether any credit ought to be given to supernatural grace, or any especial obedience to the lessons which it inspires. Closely connected with this intimation, is the reference which our Lord immediately makes to that highest species of knowledge, the knowledge of God, and which, as far as man is concerned, belongs most exclusively to those to whom it is divinely communicated.

VERSES 25—29.

The question of the lawyer proceeded from a feeling of uncertainty. Tradition ; his own private speculations ; and now a vague sense of respect for the wisdom which breathes in the discourse of Jesus, all combined to render the attainment of eternal life more than ever doubtful. Whether it ought to be sought by a more diligent observance of Pharisaic precepts ; whether there might not be a shorter way through the bold philosophy of the Sadducees or Herodians ; or whether Jesus might not, after all, be the safer guide, were inquiries which must often have passed through the minds of the class of men represented by this lawyer. Uncertain, indefinite notions, characterised both their mental and their moral state ; and the mode in which our Lord treated them, was pre-eminently wise and good. To the confused, doubtful question, of the scribe, he returned an answer which sent him, at once, from heaps of complicated traditions and reasonings, to the plain, indisputable precepts of the law. True, there was a difficulty still to be encountered. Simple as the meaning of the law, the wisdom of men had tortured the mode of its application. Who is my neighbour ? was one of a thousand questions, which might have been put in the way of exception to the simple rule of obedience. And here our Lord again answered with corresponding force and clearness. The whole mass of exceptions to the appli-

cation of the law was at once swept away. There could be no further doubt as to the interpretation of the precept. And this teaches us how to apply all God's commandments. They are superior to the distinctions of time and place, where the time and the place are not themselves marked by the law. But where can any mark of this kind be found in any of its moral precepts; or in any rule whatsoever of the Gospel? The stranger and the Samaritan were actually neighbours, in the meaning of the commandment. Priests and Levites had set a mark of limitation upon it. They saw it as they looked at the stranger, and then consulted their own copy of the law: the humble Samaritan remembered the precept, and found no mark of limitation upon it: no query respecting any exception to its application. And he acted accordingly. He obeyed the law of his God: and grace was given him to mingle love with every act of his obedience, so that the fulfilling of the law, in respect to man, might be seen and felt to have an immediate correspondence with its fulfilment in respect to God.

VERSES 30—37.

Every circumstance in this parable contributes to increase the beauty and distinctness of the narrative. The scene is laid in a district remarkable for its wild, mountain character, and still more for its being the frequent resort of banditti. In the conduct of the priest we see pride and selfishness in their worst form. He just catches a glimpse of the wounded man, and hastens away, as if some look or groan should compel him to give a momentary attention to the sufferer. The Levite, lower in office, is not quite so lost to sympathy: not quite so easily disgusted at the sight of misery. He comes and looks at the half-dying man: but that is all: he can afford him nothing better than an unavailing expression of pity. At length the Samaritan appears. He sees what

should be done, and he does it. It delays him on his journey—it costs him time and money: but the love of God and of his neighbour, is in his heart. We see him supporting the wounded stranger to the inn: we see him, even there, still watching over him; and the next morning leaving him unwillingly, and not leaving him, at all, till he had amply provided for his comfort. The poor man was a stranger; but he was well known on the road; and was glad to employ his credit, as well as his present means, to secure the sufferer's good lodging and nursing. It may be supposed that our Lord was thus minute and circumstantial in this exquisite parable, that the lawyer might learn his lesson thoroughly. The love of our neighbour is not to be shewn by a sudden and careless act of kindness. It must be earnest, patient, circumstantial.

VERSES 38—42.

Had we no further account of Martha and Mary than that which is contained in the present passage, we should have a truthful and instructive picture, but wanting in all those traits of tenderness given it by the later recitals. Martha's zealous housewifery is here simply contrasted with Mary's thoughtfulness and devotion: but we know from her deep sorrow, and earnest, noble confession, at the grave of her brother, how that busy, homely spirit, was imbued with the tenderest piety. Here we see Mary in the light only of a passive, contemplative woman, unwilling, as it might, perhaps, be supposed, to arouse herself, whatever the occasion. But when we look at the subsequent narrative, we see her among the foremost to serve and honour Jesus; each of the two sisters receiving that supplement to her character in the later incidents of the Gospel, which appears wanting here, but which being added to what we first learn of them, renders each, as near as may be, a model of female excellence.

CHAPTER XI.

VERSES 1—13.

The prayers of our Lord must have contained much that was peculiar to his own character and circumstances. For the most part he retired into complete solitude when about to pray: but we here learn, and the passage is of great interest and importance on this account, that he sometimes prayed in the midst of his disciples. What was the immediate subject of his present supplications we are not told; and one reason for the Evangelist's silence in this respect may be, that it was the example of their master, and not the prayer itself, by which the disciples were affected. They heard him appeal to his heavenly Father; they saw that, whatever the power which dwelt within him, he yet deemed it fitting to ask for helps and blessings from above: and to return thanks for the glory which descended thence, and rested upon him. This could not fail to convince them, not only of the necessity, but of the great dignity of prayer; and they felt that John had conferred a wonderful blessing upon his followers when he taught them how to engage properly in the performance of such an exercise. It is curious to observe that they considered it necessary to be taught. They were believers in God; their common religious rites could not be performed without prayer; and they had the Book of Psalms, pre-eminently calculated to teach them how to pray. There may, therefore, have been something peculiar in our Lord's manner of praying; or in the intimations which it gave of a near and actual communication with heaven; and this may have convinced them, that taught by him, they would know better what to ask of God, and better how to ask it. The characteristics of the formulary which he then gave them are its fulness, embracing all that is generally necessary, and its exclusiveness, by which it

pointedly warns the suppliant against dictating to God what He is particularly to give or do. By giving them such a model, he especially answered their request to be taught *how* to pray. They were to pray, that is, with large views of God's kingdom and purposes; with complete submission to his will; with an acknowledgment of earthly weaknesses and necessities; with confession of sin, and earnest desires for pardon, and constant defences against the power of evil. While these things are, in themselves, the grandest objects of prayer; the best things to be asked of God; so to desire, and to seek them, is to know *how* to pray. But to render the lesson perfect, two other points are added. Untiring perseverance, and faith in God as a gracious and loving Father, are elements in the devotion of Christ's disciples. If he have taught us how to pray, we shall not desist, though the Lord may long withhold the wished for grace; nor shall we hesitate to ask, sublime and mysterious though the gift may be, to receive that Spirit which shall constitute us his children, and make us partakers of the Divine nature.

VERSES 14—28.

If no observable effect had followed the expulsion of devils, the reality of the possession, or that of the cure, might reasonably have been doubted. But the keenest of the witnesses confessed the existence of disorder or defect in the sufferer, and his recovery as the consequence of the word spoken by Jesus. Let a modern reasoner explain the fact as he can. He has the alternative of two sides in regard to the original observers. The followers of Jesus believed that the miracle was wrought by the power of God; by the mightier strength, that is, of the good against the evil: his enemies believed, or pretended to believe, that it was Satanic force which accomplished the wonder. This is the alternative. Let a man divest himself of prejudice; and which side is he likely to

adopt? The illustration which follows, refers to a case which was, probably, of frequent occurrence in the early days of the Gospel. It is now the fashion to give the whole a figurative meaning. But our Lord was not telling a mere parable. He represented the condition of one or the other of those wretched people, from whom Divine mercy had driven some evil spirit. The sufferer, out of whom the demon had been driven, took pains, for the time, to keep his soul pure and holy. The demon pursued a course proper to its nature. Though expelled by force from the soul which it had possessed, there was no law to prevent its return. Not the slightest intimation is given in Scripture to lead us to suppose, that a demoniac cured might not be again possessed. Our Lord, on the contrary, shews that such was a very possible occurrence; and both the importance and the meaning of the lesson are lost sight of, when it is disjoined from the account of the miracle which occasioned it. It was, probably, with an eye fixed on the man, who had so lately been a demoniac, that our Lord gave his warning: a warning which, though originally intended for demoniacs, in the older sense, has its application to every soul suffering under Satanic influence, and an application the more forcible, the more the liberty is prized which Divine grace bestows. The woman in the crowd understood this great practical lesson: she blessed the mother of him who could speak so wisely; but beloved as that mother was, the Spiritual relationships created by the regenerating word of God secure their happy subjects a still higher blessing.

VERSES 29—36.

It appears almost incredible, that the people, in whose sight Jesus had wrought so many wonders, should still desire a sign. But miracles did not amount in their gross apprehensions to a sign. We have seen by what a species of self-

delusion they could evade the force of at least one of the most striking classes of miracles. The manifestation which they required was such as could only exist in their own imagination, and which, however within the power of Jesus, it would have been inconsistent with his character and design, to afford. It was easy for them to fancy how he might have raised an army, or called down a legion of angels, and then proceeded against the Romans, and fixed his throne, at once, upon the ruins of their empire. This would have amounted to a sign ; and it was some such act as this which they required. But Jesus had a mightier sign to give ; a sign incomparably grander than any which their vain imaginations could conceive. He was about to raise himself from the dead ; and though he spoke as if punishing the men of that generation by affording no other sign, that was the one, and that only, which could give satisfaction to every generation of his disciples even to the end of time. The conduct of those who could behold any of his miracles, or listen to his discourses, and not repent, and accept him as a Saviour, presented a striking contrast to the people of Nineveh, humbling themselves at the warning voice of Jonah. Equally base was their treatment of such a teacher compared with the respect with which the queen of Sheba listened to Solomon. Incomparably greater than Jonah, and wiser than the king of Israel, Jesus encountered insult and persecution wherever he went. But he would not hide that true light which was intended to disperse the worst darkness of the soul. To this he alluded, when he said, " No man when he hath lighted a candle putteth it in a secret place :" but in that which follows, he warns his hearers against allowing themselves to be led by any other light than that which flows from him ; the pure light which belongs to the life of God.

VERSES 37—44.

The washing which our Lord neglected was a mere ceremonial ablution ; a Pharisaic form ; and ought not to be confounded with the beautiful and comfortable rite of hospitality common to Eastern banquets. “Thou gavest me no water for my feet” was our Lord’s own rebuke of the Pharisee who had invited him to dine, but had neglected this attention. It was only, therefore, in so far as it was a mere ceremony, a pretension to especial purity and holiness, that our Lord would not imitate the Pharisaic washings. “Give alms,” he said, “and all things are clean unto you :” that is, obey the great law of love to your neighbour, and you shall not be judged according to a superstitious and artificial rule of purity. He certainly did not mean that alms-giving would of itself render them holy, or free them from the obligation to obey any outward ordinance divinely instituted ; but that, taking kindness to the necessitous as a general indication of character, the man who gave alms of whatever he had, might account all the rest fairly his own, and fit to be enjoyed, without regard to any restriction which mere human custom had imposed. In the present case, the crime of hypocrisy was added to the folly of a vexatious strictness. The Pharisees who insisted on so many purifications, were not themselves pure.

VERSES 45—54.

The stern and sublime vehemence of our Lord, on this occasion, strikingly indicates the rancour of his enemies. It may be certainly concluded, that, just and patient as he was, ready to bear with all human infirmities, and merciful even to sinners, he would not have used the language which he now employed, had not the evil passions of his hearers compelled him. The Scribe desired to apologise for the class to which

he belonged. He and his brethren could not be condemned for the same sins as the Pharisees : they were not hypocrites in the same way. But still they were hypocrites, for while they insisted, in the case of others, on the most scrupulous observance of the law ; on the payment of taxes, in every possible form ; and on the fulfilment of traditional obligations ; they themselves escaped the burthen by ingenious subtleties, and grew rich and powerful, while others, by their means, were impoverished and enslaved. They are charged, in two respects, with especial wickedness. In the first place, they followed the very path of persecution pursued by their fathers. By building the sepulchres of the prophets, whom their fathers slew, if literally understood, they committed no sin, but atoned, as far as they could, for the iniquity of their ancestors. It is not, however, in the direct sense, that our Lord's words are to be taken. His meaning is, that, as in the case of a murder, while the crime itself may be committed by one man, and the body of the victim may be buried by an associate in the crime, so the early enemies of truth, who slew the prophets, had proper accomplices in those who followed them, for they strove, by their own iniquitous arts, to bury, as it were, whatever remains there might be of God's slaughtered saints. A sepulchre may be raised in honour of the dead : or it may be designed only to conceal and obliterate every token of their existence. It was in the latter sense, that our Lord spoke of the conduct of the Jews. And the assent which they thus gave to the wickedness of their fore-fathers, made them partakers in all their guilt ; a guilt to be even still further increased by the most awful display of persecution which the world had ever yet witnessed, and which was to involve them in universal ruin. Another instance of unrighteousness on the part of the Scribes, was their wicked tampering with the means of knowledge, and with the rights of the people to all the instruction furnished by the word of

God. But while they had no love for pure wisdom themselves, they resolved that others should not enjoy it. Being themselves reprobate, they wished to keep the people at large in the same abject and lost condition.

CHAPTER XII.

VERSES 1—7.

The Scribes were a peculiar class, and their sins were not, generally, of a kind likely to be imitated by the people. Of the Sadducees, the principal crime was disbelief; a cold, disputatious opposition to everything which was spiritual; and this species of sin was not that to which the crowds now following Jesus were inclined. But the leaven of the Pharisees, the sin of hypocrisy, is common to all human hearts in their unconverted state; and has ever been found a prevailing offence where the profession of religion wears an aspect of wisdom and dignity. Nor is it necessary that the faith adopted should be venerated by the world at large, to tempt men to a hypocritical assumption of the character of believers. A very small circle of associates may be a world to the proud and vain; and to be distinguished among his fellow disciples, will often be found a quite sufficient inducement to make a man play the hypocrite with the most solemn doctrines and practices of religion. Our Lord saw that his disciples were just as likely as the Pharisees to assume a virtue which they had not; and that to be remarkable among each other for outward devotion, might soon tempt them to forget, that, inward purity, simplicity of character, meekness, and candour, were essential, as first principles to every believer in the Gospel. The strongest practical arguments that can be urged against hypocrisy immediately follow. In the first place, all arts of deceit and concealment must utterly prove vain, as God's providences and judgments successively reveal the things kept secret from every eye but his. And

in the next place, as timidity will often tempt men to be hypocrites, the great folly of such a course is shewn by the sublime and encouraging doctrine of a Divine government, so perfect, so universal, yet so particular, that even the meanest object is not lost sight of. Thus no man need ever be tempted into a mean or base falsehood from regard to his safety, knowing, as he may do, that nothing can happen without the will of God, and that by humbly imploring his help, he must surely be taking a more effectual precaution against danger than any which can be supplied by hypocrisy and a lie.

VERSES 8—12.

There is a close connection between the lesson contained in this, and that of the preceding passage. In the latter, our Lord warns his disciples against the pretensions of faith, or the assumption of a holiness, in look and garb, which has no reality answering to the symbol. Here he warns them against the want of faith, as exhibited in open rebellion against the Son of God ; shewing that freedom from hypocrisy is not necessarily freedom from sin, or a certain shield against Divine wrath. The hypocrite and the disbeliever are both guilty of a sin unto death, though in different ways. The one dishonours God's word, by confessing, but not obeying, it ; the other by denying, as well as disobeying, it. If the baseness of the one were weighed against the audacity of the other, they would, probably, be found of equal weight. Our Lord seems to have anticipated the very common case of those who, boasting that they are no hypocrites, forget the antagonist sin of which they are guilty, the sin of denying the gracious friend who offers them redemption through his blood; according to the sin spoken of in verse nine, but not that described in the next verse. In that case, the ignorance of a common infidelity is the ground of the offence, and is susceptible to all the means of ordinary grace. But the rejection

of Christ, when known as such by the testimony of the Holy Ghost, and by his work on the conscience, is not the sin of disbelief, but the sin of blasphemy : it is not a sin simply against Christ himself, but against the perfections of God ; against truth and righteousness, in all their directest and highest applications. A sin like this must, by its very nature, be unpardonable : but whether it be unpardonable any further than it is beyond the reach of repentance, is a question for careful consideration. On the one hand, its peculiar enormity seems to stamp the man who commits it with the marks of an irresistible reprobation ; but on the other, who shall deny the fact, "that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin." The assurance of constant help from the awful being, to sin against whom involves the soul in such peril of destruction, must have impressed the Apostles with a profound sense both of the power and of the goodness of the master whom they served.

VERSES 13—21.

Our Lord did not, either in this or any other case of controversy, deny his right to decide. He simply refused to interfere, where his undertaking the office of a judge might have created fresh opposition to his teaching. But he took occasion from the eagerness of the applicant who sought a share of his brother's property, to shew the vanity of all covetous desire of riches. In the example which he adduced, prudence and successful toil had enabled a man to amass considerable wealth. The time was come to enjoy it ; but God had been forgotten : the uncertainty of life had been forgotten : the soul had been forgotten : and the toil of a whole life, and all that it had produced, were annihilated in a moment, by the righteous sentence of God, whose will and service had been basely neglected for selfish aims. Had the unhappy man sought to become rich in holiness ; rich in

all the grace of a loving obedience before his God, he might still have laid up treasure for himself which God would have blessed, and, perhaps, have allowed him to enjoy for many tranquil and happy years.

VERSES 22—31.

St. Luke, when he wrote this passage, may have, probably, felt that, though he was addressing the wealthy Theophilus, it was one of those discourses of our Lord most valuable to the Christian convert. At that time it was, indeed, the great experiment of faith, to trust all things to the providence of a God and Saviour only so lately known. But without that trust, there must always be insuperable obstacles to a full and unreserved acceptance of the Gospel. Whenever, and under whatever circumstances, a man commits himself to the government and teaching of Jesus Christ, he necessarily loses his hold of the world, and ceases to depend upon it, there being numberless cases in which he finds that it is utterly impossible to serve both God and Mammon. As he must, therefore, choose the one or the other for his trust, he can never be properly a Christian till he has learnt to commit himself and his affairs, without limit or exception, to God, knowing that, while he is honestly doing the will of his Creator and Saviour, he shall not be forsaken, even in the present world. The lesson thus given is perfectly consistent even with every maxim of genuine prudence. We serve the stronger in serving God; and when the warning is given not to think of the morrow, or not to seek food or raiment, we are merely taught not to do these things in the same way as the Gentiles, who know not God. The injunction does not respect the doing, so much as the manner of doing it. That we are to look to the future is evident from the express command, "Watch;" and that we are to provide for our wants is equally shewn from the direction to be diligent: but all such precepts are to be obeyed in especial

dependence upon God; in the acknowledgment of his Providence; and by trust in the power of his grace.

VERSES 32—40.

The literal surrender of possessions; the separation from friends and home; which proved the faith of the first disciples, could only have been counterbalanced by the "substance of things hoped for," and "the evidence of things not seen." Taking these into account, the sacrifice of present delights, and the subjugation of the most natural affections became possible, even in the way of calculation; to part with good for a time, and while it is partial and imperfect, being no loss to him who is confident that he shall recover the suspended blessing, and in a perfect and imperishable form. "The kingdom," and "the treasure that faileth not," signify the state and the possessions of those who have first followed, and then watched for, Christ. Heaven will be theirs as a place of glory; and dominion, shared with Christ, will be theirs; and to them will pertain also whatever can minister to the joy of their perfect nature. But, as in the case of God's Providence, faith in which is necessary to Christians now, as well as to the first disciples, so this expectation of future glory is essential to believers in all ages; every step in the work and warfare of salvation requiring some effort, or some sacrifice, only to be endured patiently when the heart is sustained by a proportionable hope. The images used by our Lord are beautifully expressive of the watchfulness of true believers; and of the love and blessings with which the returning Jesus will reward their faithfulness. "I go to prepare a place for you," is his promise; and when he comes to receive his servants to himself, his almighty power will be still more wonderfully employed in providing for their endless enjoyment. What wise man will run the hazard, by even an occasional forgetfulness of his duty, of losing a share in these promises?

VERSES 41—48.

Peter seems to have thought that warnings of so stern a nature, were not altogether required by himself and his brother Apostles. But our Lord referred all to the test of a continued and unvarying obedience ; and, especially in the case of his ministers, to such a zeal as should be characterized by gentleness, regard for others, and a faithful dispensation of the means entrusted to them for the general good. Few of God's servants know so much of this as those to whom he has committed the preaching of his word. They are those, therefore, who, proving unfaithful, shall be beaten with many stripes. But even the less informed, for all know something, shall not wholly escape the wrath of God ; there being no actual escape from punishment, except for those to whom their master applies the merits of his own sufferings, and for whom he has effectually pleaded as the one mediator between God and man.

VERSES 49—53.

That our Lord came to send fire upon earth was announced, from the first, by John the Baptist, and that in a twofold way. First, "he shall burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire ;" and, next, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." Our Lord himself gives an additional meaning to the expression. The fire, as he speaks of it, is that force of the Gospel by which it agitates the whole mass of society, and by arousing into new activity every passion of the human heart, creates a univeral conflict, not only between the great classes of mankind, but even between the members of a single family. Jesus yearned for the hour when, by his baptism into death, He should open the path to holiness and liberty for his people ; but he knew that the standard of the cross must long be a signal of conflict, rather than of peace. As he came to take away sin, and as there would still be lovers of sin, however plainly

and largely his gospel should be preached, so must there be a continued struggle between his followers and the world; a struggle which, in itself and by its consequences, cannot fail to separate many whose mere earthly relationship would otherwise have kept them together.

VERSES 54—59.

Common signs, and common incidents, teach a truth extending far beyond the facts immediately concerned. He is usually wise in the things of this world, who takes counsel of whatever presents itself to his observation. But when a man proves his ability and acuteness, by the use which he makes of his experience to gain some earthly good, or avoid some temporary evil, that man is justly exposed to the severest judgment when he shews his indifference to the things of heaven and eternity. To tremble at a thunder cloud, but to have no fear of God: to know how dangerous it is to trifle with a severe creditor, but to be heedless as to the consequences of sin, are proofs of folly, the greatness of which can only be exceeded by the ruin which it involves.

CHAPTER XIII.

VERSES 1—5.

It should be carefully observed that our Lord, in answering the persons who told him of the Galileans, did not deny that those who perished were sinners, but simply declared that they ought not to be regarded as the worst of sinners. He, probably, in this, intended to rebuke the seditious spirit of the Galileans, and to warn them against the evils which they were thereby likely to bring upon their country. Those who perished, were the foremost to feel the effects of the rebellious disposition which at this time prevailed; but they were not the most guilty because they perished first; and their death

ought only to have been regarded by those who had hitherto escaped punishment, as a warning to repentance. The case of those who were crushed by the falling tower, was of a different kind. In the former, political sedition was punished by human authority, and thus our Lord's rebuke was, probably, directed against the multitude of turbulent spirits which now agitated society. But in the latter instance, Divine Providence only was concerned. The sinners, in this case, fell by the sentence uttered in heaven only ; and the warning, therefore, was of a general and universal nature. Did God punish all sinners according to their deserts, the world, left to the small number of his people, would long wear the appearance of an uninhabited wilderness. But while he spares the multitude, and demonstrates his justice only on the few, the former ought ever to bear in mind that it is not for their righteousness' sake that they are left, but that God's purposes may be fulfilled. However long the execution of a sinner's sentence may be delayed, repentance only, and faith in the Lord Jesus, can absolutely annul it ; so that, though he may neither perish by the sword, nor fall beneath any of the more secret visitations of the Lord, the day will come, when, to other causes of confusion will be added this, that while he saw other sinners perishing, he refused to consider that they were dying, not for their sins only, but for that common sinfulness of which he, himself, was a partaker.

VERSES 6—9.

The more closely this brief parable is considered, the more impressive is the instruction which it conveys. Thus, the fig-tree was planted in a vineyard, and might, therefore, be regarded as an object of especial care and hope to him who had given it all the advantages of a fertile and sheltered soil. And in the same way, when any individual is, by the providence of God, taken from the midst of the world, and placed

in a position in anywise more than usually favourable to the growth of holiness, he ought to consider himself as a tree of the Lord's planting, and as an object of his particular regard. This remark may be applied, not only to the greater instances of Christian privileges, but to all the varieties of God's merciful interferences on our behalf, when he shelters us from the danger of ordinary temptations, or brings us, for a time, into nearer communion with his people. But the parable represents the tree as enjoying, for three years, the good soil of the vineyard. This was an ample period for the trial of its fruitfulness. And so again, we may be quite sure, that whatever the opportunities of grace allowed by God, they are sufficient in themselves, to afford the good required. Let a man see that mercy has been shewn him: that he is now a partaker of the blessings of the Gospel, guarded against the violence of Satan in the fold of Christ; hedged round by the ordinances of his church from the evil influence of the world; and he may be quite sure that the period, whatever it may be, allowed him in this favourable condition, will not be too short, unless through his own fault, for his bearing rich and abundant fruit to the glory of God. But the fig-tree remained barren to the third year; and it would have been cut down, had not the dresser of the vineyard prayed that he might try what another year, and still more care, might effect. Here we see the especial mercy of Christ. He has a people, as the vine-dresser had his vineyard, which might well engross all his consideration. But he will not forget the poor stranger brought among them; and though year after year there is nothing to encourage hope, he will still shield him against the coming wrath, and will employ all the resources of his mercy to change the hard and corrupted heart. Instances of Christ's compassion, thus exercised, may be seen every day. Sinners who have long enjoyed, but enjoyed in vain, the means of grace, are visited, at last, by special providences; are warned by

affliction ; appealed to by preachers more than usually earnest ; stirred by the alarms of conscience, and made, as it would sometimes seem, to learn the truth in spite of themselves. This is the last season for them ; and as we are not told what was the result of the vine-dresser's care, and patience, so we may conclude that, in some cases, the mercy of the Lord prevails, though late, in the conversion of the tardy sinner, while, in others, the compassion is still shewn in vain, and is compelled to give way to justice.

VERSES 10—17.

No direct appeal to the mercy of Jesus appears to have been made by the afflicted woman. We hear of no confession of faith in his power proceeding from her lips. But there is this important circumstance to be considered. Her infirmities had lasted eighteen years, and she was bowed to the very earth by the weight of her affliction. Still she sought the house of prayer ; still she would come where the word of God might be heard. Jesus needed no outward appeal in such a case. He saw her humility, her faith, her meek resignation to suffering ; and there is wonderful beauty in the simple statement, that he only looked upon her, and then healed her. That he had not mistaken the state of her soul is indicated by another mark of spirituality : the mercy was instantly followed by thanksgiving. "She was made straight, and glorified God." No surer sign, indeed, can be given of habitual holiness, than the instantaneous feeling with which a child of God recognizes the hand of God in every instance of help and deliverance. Prepared, as we are, for proofs of pride and legal harshness, on the part of the Jews, there is something more than usually painful in the example of this ruler of the synagogue. What could have been the state of his mind or heart when he found it possible to charge Jesus with sin for such an act of pure compassion ? We may well understand the truth of the state-

ment that when Jesus had answered him, not only he, but all who had joined with him "were ashamed." The expression, "whom Satan hath bound," may be interpreted either literally, as meaning an actual consequence of Satan's malice, permitted by God, as in the case of Job, or of St. Paul, "The messenger of Satan;" or it may be regarded as uttered only in conformity with the general belief that all sicknesses were the result of sin, and in so far connected with Satanic power.

VERSES 18—21.

The double question put by Jesus intimates his desire to excite an earnest attention to his words. It was of great importance to his followers, that they should early understand the manner in which his kingdom would extend itself. The two comparisons employed are admirably adapted to convey the necessary knowledge on this subject. Thus, by the first, we learn that, minute as was the kingdom of God among men, at the beginning, it had a life in it, through which it would gradually expand, and become sufficient for all the purposes contemplated in its establishment. Knowing this, the early disciple did not tremble when he compared the little band to which he belonged, with the hosts which constituted the kingdom of this world. And still recognizing the principle of growth, the believer of a later period feels no alarm when he beholds the rapidity with which earthly dominions of every kind extend themselves, and the comparatively slow advance of the real kingdom of God. He knows that the one is but the mechanical addition of mass to mass, while the increase of the other is actual growth; the former being the work of outward force; the other the expansion of inward life. The second comparison teaches us not merely how the kingdom of God itself grows, but how it acts upon the world. Had we the former simile only, we might regard the kingdom of God as still remaining isolated,

in all the stages of its growth, from the masses of mankind ; as keeping, so to speak, its life to itself ; or, at most, only affording shelter to those who seek it ; as a tree may send out its branches, and so afford a lodging for the birds who build their nests there, but only as they have chosen it for their home. But view it under the similitude of leaven, and you find it, in its growth, imbuing multitudes with life who would never of themselves have sought, or even desired it. Wherever it goes, to whatever degree it expands, it takes its life with it, in order to diffuse it, and so shall continue to do, till the whole of humanity, with the exception of the reprobate, become permeated with its essence.

VERSES 22—30.

Had it been more clearly understood that Jesus was now approaching the term of his earthly ministry, he would probably have been still more pressed with questions of a curious and speculative character, the fruit of mingled anxiety, affection and mysterious alarm. The inquiry here made may be attributed to very different motives. It might be the question of a scorner, wishing to shew contempt for the purity and strictness of our Lord's doctrine : it might result from the pride of discipleship, wishing to enhance the worth of heaven, by closing it to all but the few : it might have been prompted, by fear not yet leading to repentance, or by fear sufficiently humbling, but not yet corrected by faith and hope. Many other motives for the inquiry might be suggested : but whatever its origin, there was so much of error, either in the question itself, or in the manner of putting it, that our Lord's answer by not being direct implied rebuke. But the answer, though thus modified, contained as much information as an honest enquirer could expect, or even wish to receive. It shews that few only will seek effectually to enter in at the strait gate, and that therefore, few only will be saved : but it

shews also that, practically considered, this is their own fault ; that it is because they strive without having attended to the rule of the Gospel ; to the conditions upon which the prize of the great contest is offered. This is further explained by the illustration which follows. The master of a house has invited many guests. Few of them only care to attend to the circumstances of the invitation ; to the hour appointed ; to the dress in which they ought to appear ; and to other particulars connected with the tastes, principles, or temper of the host. The few who think it well worth their while to partake of the feast enter the banquet-room at the proper time, the door is shut, and hospitality, friendship, with all the legitimate delights of social intercourse awaken an expression of joy in every heart. Suddenly a report reaches the ears of those who had treated the invitation with such contempt, that the master of the house is a much wealthier, and a far greater, man than they had supposed, and that those who had become his guests were not only to feast with him that evening, but were about to be raised by his influence to stations of great power and dignity. This news at once changes the feelings of his neighbours. They rush to his house ; knock anxiously at the door of the banquet-room ; plead acquaintanceship and services never before heard of, and add tears to their entreaties to be admitted to his table. But all in vain. They have discovered their own folly and his worth too late. Though workers of iniquity, they might have repented, and been accepted ; but as workers of iniquity, not repenting in time, they are rejected for ever.

VERSES 31—35.

It may here again be doubted from what motive the words addressed to our Lord were uttered. Some of the Pharisees may have been moved by his discourses really to desire his safety ; or the warning may have sprung from no other wish

than that of inducing him to leave their neighbourhood. But Jesus shewed how utterly he despised the threats of human tyranny. His path was traced, and lay plainly before him. He had no will to turn back, and no power either of earth or hell could divert him from his course. The time appointed for his design was as exactly fixed as the end for which he laboured; and there was but one spot in the universe that could receive his expiatory blood. Jerusalem enjoyed, at once, the highest glory, and was involved in the deepest guilt, of all the cities of the world. It was there alone that the atoning sacrifice could be offered up; and there it was that sin had wrought its worst crimes, and attained its ripest form. As the angel of the covenant in early times, Jesus had sought the salvation of this unhappy city. But it had despised the proffered mercy. The day of salvation was now past; and Jesus was to appear no more till, clothed in majesty, and surrounded by the hosts of heaven, his enemies even, with unspeakable awe and terror, shall pronounce him blessed. But that a prophet could not perish out of Jerusalem ought not, perhaps, to be taken in a literal sense. This would have been the case, supposing that our Lord referred to the legal trial and condemnation of a false prophet. But he was evidently speaking only of true and holy men; and his meaning seems to have been, that such was the hatred of Jerusalem to the servants of God, that it thirsted for their blood, and hence created a species of necessity that they should perish by its sentence.

CHAPTER XIV.

VERSES 1—6.

Whatever the locality referred to in this passage, it was evidently one of great resort. But the attempt to fix the scene of every miracle, or important action of our Lord, may lead

to unnecessary perplexities. It is possible that the circumstances here described, like others of the same kind, may have taken place in some neighbourhood, populous only for a season, and otherwise unworthy of note. But wherever it was that Jesus exercised his mercy or proclaimed the doctrines of his Gospel, he encountered the same prejudices, the same ignorance of truth and opposition to charity.

VERSES 7—11.

In the advice thus given, our Lord consulted both the happiness and the dignity of his disciples. One of the greatest foes to peace and comfort is that jealous, watchful desire of attention by which some men are occupied, whatever society they enter. But hostile as is such a feeling to the true enjoyment of social intercourse, it is no less so to dignity and proper self-respect; the worth of a man being little indeed, if it can be either increased or diminished by the place assigned him at a table. But real superiority to these things is not of easy attainment; and happy are they who can avail themselves readily of the grace of Divine wisdom to overcome their human weaknesses.

VERSES 12—14.

Whether this passage be interpreted literally or not, it must certainly mean more than Christians generally seem prepared to allow. An expenditure on gay entertainments, which leaves nothing in the purse to feed the poor must, taking the very lowest view of our Lord's instruction, be inconsistent with a profession of the Gospel.

VERSES 15—24.

The connection between the following parable and the preceding discourse should be carefully observed. Our Lord had just taught a lesson of prudence, humility, and charity.

His words excited the especial attention of one of the hearers, and reference being made to the happy repasts which may be looked for in the kingdom of heaven, our Lord proceeded to shew, how that, with all the eagerness which men occasionally express to enjoy the presence and blessing of God, his actual call is commonly disregarded, and the invitation to his table rejected for the most ordinary worldly interest. The piece of ground, the oxen, and the marriage had all a due right to attention ; but this could have been rendered, and still the call to the royal table obeyed. No man's lawful business can ever keep him from God. It may deprive him on extraordinary occasions of the enjoyment of a particular ordinance ; but it cannot place him in the condition of the persons represented in the parable ; the feast spoken of not being intended to represent any single celebration of any single rite, but the standing, continuous banquet of spiritual communion with God, to reject which, on any account whatever, is to reject salvation. The historical or prophetical meaning of the parable as referring to the reprobate Jews, and favoured Gentiles, affords an important illustration of a large portion of Scripture ; but so solemn a warning is conveyed to the individual Christian that it is difficult to say for which the story is most to be valued, its general or particular application.

VERSES 25—35.

This account of the multitudes which followed our Lord, and of the manner in which he addressed them, bears the plainest impress of truth and reality. It was natural for the crowd to rush eagerly after one who exhibited such proofs of power and benevolence, and among the multitudes who thus pursued his steps, there could scarcely fail to be many who would wish to unite themselves to him in the more permanent bonds of discipleship. Jesus heard their hasty expressions of

devotion to his cause; but he knew the weakness of their hearts; and in mercy told them what were the sacrifices which they must be prepared to make on becoming his followers. To hate the dearest relatives, to hate one's own life, is indeed a hard condition, however great the desire for fellowship with Christ, if it must be fulfilled in all its naked strictness. But it is evident that neither a natural, nor a moral hatred is expected of us. To hate, in the common sense of the word, is incompatible with Christian graces. But the hatred which a believer in Jesus exercises in regard to all earthly relations and possessions, is the feeling which disposes him utterly to reject all claims upon his affections which may, in any degree, tend to win him from Christ. Everything is subordinate to his faith; and whatever opposes it, appears to him in the light of an enemy, and must be resisted or avoided. This will not interfere with the obligations of natural or moral duty. The man who will not let his affections keep him from Christ, will, in obedience to Christ, fulfil every claim which the world or friends, can make upon him. In taking up the cross, he shews his hatred to himself, for he thus prepares to crucify himself; but by this very act, he proves that he has the greatest concern and love for himself: and, in a similar way, when he hates and forsakes his nearest relations for Christ's sake, his hatred extends only to that which is earthly and sinful in them, and this, as in the case of his spiritual crucifixion, having fulfilled its purpose, his love is freer and more powerful than ever to accomplish its noblest ends. To adopt the profession of the Gospel, without considerations of this kind, is to run the hazard of falling into the grossest follies and inconsistencies. It is to begin to build a house without counting the cost; or to proceed against an enemy without having enquired into the force which we have to resist. The cost and the risk are of the highest kind, whenever a man truly purposes to embrace the Gospel. All that he has, he places at God's disposal. God

may actually take of it only so much as is required to accomplish some part of the great design of charity and religion: or he may take it all, choosing to try the sincerity of the convert. He is, therefore, an unwise or a dishonest calculator who, forewarned by Christ, professes to follow him without knowing what he hazards by the attempt. In the concluding comparison, salt represents not the grace itself which makes a man a Christian, for grace cannot lose its savour, but the convictions, the reasonings and motives which are personal. While they had any life and vigour they were profitable; but let them lose these properties, and they become wholly worthless.

CHAPTER XV.

VERSES 1—10.

No crowd can be so difficult for a teacher, as one which consists of men drawn together by totally opposite motives. But such was the usual character of the multitude which our Lord had to address, and it was especially so on the present occasion. Who, then, can fail to admire the method which he employed in his discourse? Though exquisitely adapted to encourage and convince the enquiring penitent, it was no less fitted to shew the proudest Pharisee, or the subtlest Scribe, the way to salvation. If the latter became more hardened in pride through the rebuke which they received, it was not because there was anything in the admonition, itself, calculated to increase their evil disposition. A clearer and fuller display of the Divine goodness; plain instances of God's fatherly concern for the whole family of mankind, were as properly adapted to inspire the heart of a Scribe or Pharisee with nobler convictions and hopes, as they were to comfort the conscience-stricken sinner. It is a great mistake, therefore, to look with such a one-sided view at our Lord's dis-

courses, as to suppose them intended for the good of those only whom they seem most pointedly to regard. They were the words of life for all who would receive them; and so, no doubt, they proved in many unrecorded cases of conversion among the most prejudiced, as well as among the humblest of the hearers.

The parables, themselves, are appeals to common feeling, as illustrative of God's proceedings through the Gospel. For the sake of argument, our Lord allowed his opponents the utmost they could require, and supposed, for the moment, that those who are safe in obedience to God, are as ninety-nine to one. Yet, even on that supposition, God would be but acting, as reason and mercy teach us to act, if he instituted a special dispensation to recover that one unhappy being, in the hundred, who was likely to perish. All Scripture is founded on the principle, that God is affected by love and mercy, and all their attendant influences, in his view of the human race. Bearing this in mind, we cannot suppose that, if our natural affections, or our notions of profit and loss, would set us searching for one thing out of a hundred, God can be unconcerned about one soul in a hundred. But the force of this reasoning is greatly increased when we remember, that it was only for the sake of argument, that our Lord spoke of one in a hundred as exposed to destruction, and that, in reality, it is only one in a hundred that is likely to be saved, while the other ninety and nine are wandering from God, and ready to perish. It is evident that, if it would only be in accordance with Divine mercy, to institute a new dispensation, to save one lost soul, it must be much more so where ninety and nine are concerned: and that, consequently, if our Lord's argument, even as it stood, was sufficiently powerful to silence his opponents, the force which actually belonged to it, though not put forth, ought to close the lips of every gainsayer, questioning the necessity, or the value of the Gospel.

Of the joy, in heaven, over one repenting sinner, there can be no doubt, when it is considered, that the Son of God accounts such a soul his own gain. But, we must make a further reference to human feeling, when we wish to understand how it is, that there is more joy over one penitent, than over ninety and nine just persons. Our Lord's own illustrations shew plainly, that we always delight more in that which we recover, than in that which we have never lost. The experience of every-day life affords proof of the anxiety with which men seek that which they miss out of their abundance; and how they triumph when the lost is found; or the forfeited redeemed. God, with infinite mercy, submits to act according to the principles which we can best understand, and, as we rejoice, so will He: as we, on earth, delight in the success of a plan instituted to recover the lost, so will his family in heaven. As here, for a time, the recovered is more valued than the whole from which it was taken, so, there, the salvation of the sinner, is a cause of livelier joy, than the salvation of those for whom there was no fear.

VERSES 11—19.

The application of this parable embraces a much larger circle, than that to which it is commonly addressed. It is not the poor and wretched sinner only, grovelling in the lowest state of licentiousness, who has left his father's house. This is the condition of every man, to whom the world is more agreeable than the kingdom of heaven, the church of God, the communion of saints. The feeling, which led the young man to leave his father's house, was, at least, as strong, and as fraught with evil, the first step he set, as it was when he reached the door of the swineherd: in all probability, it had declined, rather than increased, with experience. Its grossness of outward character; its rude and boisterous expression, and then the loathsome consequences of sickness and

larger application of the lesson, the stern and angry temper of the man, who could quarrel at the joy of his father, over a repenting child, is the counterpart of the disposition of the world, in the case of the penitent. While little care is taken to watch the first signs of sorrow and improvement, still less proof is given of a friendly and loving readiness to foster the returning prodigal, and afford him that assurance of restoration, which, in many instances, seems necessary to the strengthening of his good purposes. Could a history of penitents be written, it would be seen how different their subsequent course has been, according as they have fallen into the hands of a merciful father, or been judged by the maxims of an elder brother.

CHAPTER XVI.

VERSES 1—12.

This striking and instructive parable startles most readers, at first, by its seeming commendation of dishonest cunning. That praise is given to the steward cannot be denied; nor is it to be questioned that the praise given is given for his artifice: but then it must be recollect ed that the whole affair is supposed to be viewed from the stage of the world, and according to the rule and the light of earthly expediency. For the moment, this life, the means of supporting it, opportunities of comfort and enjoyment, are regarded as the only objects worthy of consideration. To understand the parable, therefore, we must compare the worldly steward, not with the holy and the spiritual, with good and virtuous men, but simply with worldly men. Now among the latter there are some who have more foresight than others, but all who do not fall below the common rate of prudence, prove their discretion by not letting poverty, or other kinds of ruin overtake them for want of precaution. The steward disregarding all considerations but those of safety and conve-

nience, acted as well, reasoning according to his own rule, as circumstances would let him. He exercised foresight, and he made the best use of his time, and opportunities. Thus, looking only to the world, and only to the present, he acted wisely, and a worldly man being his judge would acknowledge this, and not the less so because he himself by superior acuteness had detected the fraud. But let this foresight, this anxious effort to secure bread and a house for the future in the present world, be compared with the slothful, hesitating conduct of professed believers in a state of eternal rewards and punishments, and the superior wisdom of the former, according to their views, to that of the religious, according to their views, will instantly be seen. The former make the best of their circumstances, and act accordingly: the latter do not. The one are consistent, and as far as consistency in itself deserves praise, they deserve it; the others are rarely consistent with their supposed faith; and merit a proportionable degree of blame. When our Lord, in conclusion, teaches us to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, he may either intend, that we should endeavour to convert the things of this world into means of spiritual good; or that our conduct, in respect to honesty, though not in respect to foresight or diligence, should be the very reverse of that of the unjust steward; that we ought to be faithful in the least, looking forward to nobler trusts; and that, if such be our conduct, when we fail here, or be called to give up our earthly stewardships, we shall need no artifice to secure a home, but shall be rejoicingly admitted into an everlasting habitation. But that which we now depend on, either as creatures of God, or as his children by adoption; that which he may permit us in either of these relations to call our own, we must not expect to retain, if we be unfaithful to any of the trusts which we are sent into this world expressly to fulfil. Not honest in the management of the unrighteous

the grave, the contemplation becomes unspeakably awful, but not more awful than interesting. We feel the danger of worldly prosperity : the sufferings of poverty and neglect lose their terrors : the justice of God is vindicated; heaven and hell seem nearer to us than before ; and all the circumstances of our transition from time to eternity change their indistinct and shadowy forms, for substantial, positive, and intelligible realities. To the writer of these notes, it seems almost impossible, after reading a narrative like this, to doubt the unbroken, sleepless, consciousness of the soul, as it passes along the valley of the shadow of death ; or the mutual, personal recognition of departed souls, or their interest in the affairs of this world, in so far as they are connected with the principal ends of creation. To suppose the contrary of all this is to refine away the teaching of Scripture under a mistaken zeal for spiritual truth. Every impression left by the simple, unsophisticated study of our Lord's representation, would be a dangerous error, an unhealthy fancy, if holy souls be not treated as this history shews, but be suffered to fall into a state totally different to that described. Were there no knowledge of each other among the inhabitants of Paradise, or Gehenna, the very meaning of this history would be lost. Taking it but as a parable, this observation holds equally good. The recital is intended to convey a warning, on the one hand, and, on the other, the sweetest and most exhilarating consolation ; but what would become of it all, if we could suppose that none of the particulars to which it owes its power over the heart, has any existence in reality ? Let not the dreamy, luxurious, selfish man of the world, indulge himself in such a notion ; but rather let him look forward to the time when a cup of cold water shall seem to him worth more than all the Indies ; and let him not doubt but that then, if he have left behind him those whom he loves, he will be tortured with agony, at the thought, that his example led them into destruc-

tion, and that now, though he would fain warn them of their danger, his means of helping them are for ever lost. Nor let the poor, suffering believer doubt the reality of any one point of this narrative. Let him not question but that angels, or the Lord himself, will conduct him through the valley of the shadow of death : let him not fear but that in the mansions prepared for him above, he shall meet, and recognise, the friends of his youth, all whom his purified and exalted spirit can desire to share with him the glories of his new existence.

CHAPTER XVII.

VERSES 1—10.

The impossibility of which our Lord here speaks is the general consequence of sin. In a world where all are originally corrupt and opposed to God, and only a comparatively small number, at any time, converted, offences must needs come. But though this is the case, looking at the world in itself, it is far from impossible for us, as individuals, to avoid increasing the sum of iniquity. We may seek grace, we may ask for wisdom, we may hear the call of Christ, and, hence, though we live in a world where, as it at present exists, offences will come, woe unto us if we create them. It was, however, with a more particular reference to the future struggles of his disciples that our Lord spok^a. He wished it to be understood that the commonest notions and passions prevalent in the world would dispose men to persecute believers in the Gospel ; but, at the same time, he warned the persecutor that the mingled corruption and ignorance which urged him to such a course, would be no apology for his sin, and that he would perish miserably, though his offence was committed against the weakest and obscurest of the children of God. At the same time, he admonishes his

disciples to be loving and forgiving towards each other, lest they themselves should create offences; and hence their earnest and appropriate prayer, "increase our faith," their inward consciousness telling them, that it was only by the power of a living faith that they could ever properly fulfil the wishes of their Lord. His answer to them justifies their belief in the power of faith; but he passes on to the more general subject of the duty which they owed him. He could see that the notion of merit, of a right to rewards and distinctions, was working in their hearts. Such a feeling, if unchecked, must prove fatal to the dispositions most essential to their usefulness. He, at once, therefore, suppressed it; waiting for the future to unfold more clearly the doctrine upon which this great lesson rests.

VERSES 11—19.

These ten lepers were humbled by sickness, and by accumulated misery. The condition of the leper is but ill-understood, when he is viewed only as a sick man. Dread of infection, and the provisions of the Mosaic rule, made him, practically, an outlaw. He had neither home nor friends; and it is not improbable that, as all sickness was regarded among the Jews in the light of a penal infliction, the leper was viewed with abhorrence, even by his relatives. Never, therefore, was the voice, heard afar off, more certain of response from Jesus, than the voice of the leper. In this case the cry was loud and piercing. Each of the ten sufferers had told his tale to the rest, and the sudden prospect of relief would but render the burden of their wretchedness so much the more perceptible. The answer was given. It was felt to be all-sufficient; and the cured lepers hastened to demand the removal of the ban which had driven them from their homes. That they obeyed the directions of Jesus, and proceeded to shew themselves to the priest, might be regarded

as a proof of reverence to their benefactor. But it was not so. They went to the priest, because he alone could legally re-admit them to their social position. From the temper which nine of them manifested, they would, probably, have treated the law with as much disregard as they shewed for Jesus. But they must still have been outcasts, had not the priest acknowledged them clean. Their ingratitude ought not to be viewed as an instance of the common ingratitude of the world, but of that of men who call upon God for special mercies, and receive them, but straightway forget the power to which they owe their deliverance. The one in ten, who returned to give thanks, was a Samaritan : the person who, of all others, seemed least likely to fulfil his duty graciously and becomingly ; so little can we tell, by outward appearances or circumstances, whose souls are the most thankful, and most readily devoted to God.

VERSES 20—30.

The coming of the kingdom of God, and the personal coming of Christ, are clearly distinguished in this passage. God having laid the foundation of his kingdom in the merits and the mediation of his son, carries it on by his word and Holy Spirit, both of which work unseen in the souls of men, subduing them more and more to the Divine will, and enlarging the borders of his kingdom as the number of these true converts continues to increase. Thus the kingdom of God cometh not with observation ; but is both invisible in itself, and invisible in its growth, both the one and the other being hid in the depths of men's hearts. The coming of Christ, on the contrary, though indicating the consummation of this kingdom will be a startling and splendid display of Divine glory, visible to all the world, and far beyond it, rousing to admiration or to terror, myriads of beings, of whose connection with the Almighty's plans we have, as yet, no

knowledge. But when our Lord thus spoke to his disciples, the day of his coming was far distant. He had still to suffer ; and often since then have his people desired, in vain, to see the signs of his approach. Deceivers have taken advantage of this the known anxiety of believers. False Christs have appeared ; and others may yet appear : but his coming shall be with such manifestations of power, that when it really takes place no one shall be able to question whether it be he that should come or another.

VERSES 31—37.

The warnings which our Lord gives in this latter part of his discourse, seem to refer to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, rather than to the final judgment of the world. But when the disciples asked him where these things should take place, he answered them enigmatically. By the mention of eagles, it is commonly supposed that allusion is made to the Roman armies, and, hence, that the calamities of Jerusalem formed the subject of the prophecy. It is not necessary, however, thus to confine the interpretation. Our Lord seems rather to have corrected the disciples, by answering to their “where, Lord ?” “Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.” The mighty mass of a dissolving universe will offer a prey more various than unnumbered battle-fields.

C H A P T E R XVIII.

VERSES 1—8.

The Christian, in every stage of his progress, requires encouragements, and helps to prayer. It is natural to the human heart to doubt and tremble ; and though men pray, without a revelation to assist or guide them, it is revelation only which can save them from ceasing to hope, if an answer

to their supplications be long delayed. Thus, one of the greatest discouragements to prayer, as far as mere nature is concerned, arises from the experience, that the urgency of our desire is no measure of time for God. Few would not pray, if they were sure of a speedy answer; and even where there is faith enough to begin, there is rarely enough to continue. This is an evil which our Lord aims at correcting in the present parable. And he reasons thus. The worst and most unmerciful of men cannot resist persevering importunity. We see this every day, and the assurance that perseverance may effect what we wish, commonly determines us to exercise the necessary patience. But we must be cautious not to mistake the real point of the parable. Our Lord does not mean that God can be persuaded, by arguments, corresponding in any wise to those which influenced the unjust judge. The whole force of the example is concentrated in the moral, that if men will persevere in supplicating their fellow men, and even under the worst circumstances, they certainly ought not to be impatient, or to give over praying, after some slight appeal, when they are addressing a merciful and gracious God. To persevere in the one case, and not in the other, is a gross practical inconsistency. The motives which lead God to answer prayer, are different in every respect to those which affected the unjust judge: and so also are the causes which render perseverance effectual in such opposite instances. The judge regarded only his own ease; God has respect only to the benefit of the petitioner's soul; but as perseverance in the latter case, as well as in the former, is both a condition and means of success, our Lord appeals to the common sense of his disciples, and so teaches them that they ought always to pray, and not to faint. The concluding sentence of verse seven seems to refer to the patience which God exercises in behalf of his elect. He bears, indeed, long with all men, even the holiest; but here the meaning is not

that he mercifully endures the errings of his people, but that, for their sake, he exercises forbearance and long-suffering, that he may accomplish their deliverance by the best and surest means. A very important and solemn question follows. Notwithstanding all that is promised to the obedient, and all the warnings to the impenitent, shall there be found faith on earth when Christ comes to judgment?

VERSES 9—17.

The Pharisee, by his mode of reasoning, contradicted the most essential principles of his own religion. It was not the law which could justify the best or holiest Jew. Faith was as necessary to him as to the Christian. Every sacrifice indicated the existence of sin, and when the devout worshipper— owned the bleeding victim, he confessed that it was impossible to be justified by his own righteousness. When the Pharisee, therefore, boasted of his obedience to the law, he forgot that he had again and again pleaded guilty in having broken that law; while the poor publican, readily confessing all his sins, and crying for mercy only, in simple hope of God's compassion, took the really proper course for obtaining that justification, which is alone possible for a corrupt and guilty creature. The introduction of little children so soon after the delivery of this important lesson, afforded a further confirmation of the principle upon which it rests. It is no to an ideal purity in children that our Lord referred; but to their loving and meek dependence upon others. In this they exercise a real faith; and when they are properly taught, the objects of Divine truth find a ready entrance into their hearts, and affect them with corresponding emotions. They thus afford an edifying and beautiful example to those who honestly desire to prepare for the kingdom of Heaven. Unlike the Pharisee, the child boasts not of its own virtues, whatever they may be, but looks out, with an admiring sim-

plicity, upon the power and excellence of others. With no proud assumption of self-sufficiency, it seeks help and support from all around; and it answers with a ready and unsuspecting love, the supply of its little wants. So let a man think humbly of himself, and look to, and depend upon, God, and he is not far from his kingdom.

VERSES 18—30.

The young man may have intended a particular courtesy towards our Lord; or there may have been a tone in his expression, which shewed that he meant more by the term “good,” than is commonly implied. On the latter supposition, we may easily account for the question with which our Lord probed him, and compelled him to enquire of himself, why he ascribed a divine property to one, whom, after all, he might be little inclined to worship or obey. The desire of eternal life, by which he was animated, would have been cheaply satisfied, had that greatest of blessings been purchasable at so low a rate as the partial obedience he had rendered to the law. If his legal state, his conformity with the rule of God, as then known, had been as perfect as he vainly imagined, his love of wealth would never have hindered, for a moment, his readiness to follow him, whom he called “good.” The test which our Lord employed was eminently adapted to the case. There is a delicate, but distinct, and powerful connection between every particular in his quiet reasoning. Though he put the young man to a difficult proof, it was not beyond the mark of the law, or the line drawn by the young man’s own professions. Eternal life was the object sought. The price was asked. You have not yet given enough. What more shall I give? At first, give your wealth. The next would have been, give yourself. But he would not give even the former, and there ended the conference. It was very natural for the disciples, on hearing this discussion, to

speak of their own sacrifices. But even they, as yet, knew little of the mystery of godliness ; its trials and rewards ; and their Master taught them to be satisfied with such a general assurance of future good, as might set their hearts at ease, and yet exercise their faith.

VERSES 31—34.

There is a particular emphasis in the statement, that our Lord now called his twelve disciples around him. It was to communicate to them more definitely than he had yet done, the approaching fulfilment of his great design. The more closely we observe his progress and method, the more striking are the proofs of his wisdom. Had he not prepared the minds of his followers for the doctrine of the cross, his death would not merely have distressed them, it would have utterly destroyed their confidence in his truth. As we here read, he kept back nothing which could tend to darken the awful scene before them. The scourge, the spitting, the buffeting, the mockery, each was named with a startling exactness. All that was said, sounded, at the time, like a fable : but it produced its intended effect in the end. A preparatory state of feeling had been created, which, notwithstanding the first wilful ignorance of the disciples, taught them to witness the sufferings of their Master, not with the disgusts of terror, but with the solemnity of awe. At a later period, the recollection that all had been foretold, could not fail to impress them with the important truth, that what our Lord suffered, he suffered of his own will : that the minutest particular of his history could be foretold, because, as he foresaw it, so also he was ready to endure it.

VERSES 35—43.

The slight differences in the three accounts of this miracle, shew, that those who wrote them, had, at least, three separate

sources of information. The incidents must, consequently, have been examined by many enquirers; and, as the result of the test, we have a close agreement among the three Evangelists, about every circumstance in which we are materially interested. The blind man was rebuked for his clamorous prayer; but he still prayed; proclaimed his belief, and received his sight.

CHAPTER XIX.

VERSES 1—10.

The character of Zacchæus deserves attentive consideration. He was a tax-gatherer, and one of the chief of his class. Diligence, and some employment of the arts common to his calling, had made him rich. But wealth could not make him happy. His heart was warmed by more generous sentiments than those which men were accustomed to look for in a publican. He carefully recalled the events of his life, and acting with a justice stern as the law itself, he restored fourfold to those whom he had been tempted to injure. Had he done nothing more, he might have claimed a high degree of admiration; but he added to the grace of a most severe honesty, that of the purest benevolence. While he restored fourfold to those whom he had in any wise defrauded, he gave half his riches to those who had no claim upon him but their poverty. While thus exercising virtue, according to the best dictations of his conscience, he still yearned for light, to know how he might draw nearer to God. The tidings of Jesus were not lost upon his anxious ear. He instinctively felt that a salvation was now to be had, such as no works of his own could ever procure him. Difficulties, opposition, ridicule, were not worth a thought, where such an object was in view. Jesus met the zeal of his honest, fervent heart, with corresponding mercy; and carried salvation to him, and to his house. A

happy day, indeed, that is, for the sinner, when Jesus numbers him among the children of Abraham ; when, having hitherto been a stranger to the covenant of promise, he becomes, on that high authority, an undisputed partaker of its blessings.

VERSES 11—27.

Whether talents, pounds or pence, be mentioned in parables, it is not the amount of the money, but its comparison with other objects, which should engage attention. Nine or ten pounds, the value of the pound or talent, here meant, appears an insignificant sum to be committed to the faithful servant of a great nobleman about to take possession of a kingdom. But compare the sum, whatever it was, with the government of ten cities, and the lesson intended by our Lord is impressed on the mind with wonderful force and clearness. Whatever, indeed, Jesus intrusts us with here, though of incomparably greater worth than millions of money, must appear insignificant when estimated by the rewards which will follow its faithful and profitable employment. Three classes of persons are brought to notice in the present parable. The good servants who, during the absence of their master, did whatever lay in their power to improve his revenue, and who plainly represent earnest, devoted Christians, rejoicing to employ all gifts and graces, means and opportunities, for the advancement of holiness, both in themselves and others. We have next, the idle, slothful servant, who as plainly answers to the Christian who acknowledges Christ as his master, but uses none of the blessings and privileges of the Gospel to promote his honour. And then we have the confessed enemies of Christ, the world, that is, with all the several classes of mankind, who refuse to submit themselves to the kingdom of heaven; who have told Christ as much, but who, on his return in glory, will find his wrath too terrible for the stoutest heart to endure. Happy then it will indeed be for those who have

occupied a place among the faithful servants, and who, whether they were intrusted with little or much, sought Divine counsel that they might know how best to employ it, and then exercised all diligence that their Lord might have his own with usury.

VERSES 28—40.

We are now again on the track of the other Gospels, which St. Luke left when he began to employ the materials which had come into his hands, as independent of the preceding Evangelists, or not consulted by them. An attentive reader will carefully observe the minute points in each narrative. But this must be done according to a well considered principle. First; the second or third reading of the same account, where the account concerns some matter of very great importance, ought to affect us with a deep concern for our own state, as far as it can have any connection with the facts related. In the present case, for example, our Lord is tranquilly approaching the scene and period of suffering. The more we read or hear of this awful truth, do we feel more deeply the value of redemption? Are we more acutely affected by the sense of our deliverance? Is our personal sympathy more intensely engaged in the contemplation of all that Jesus did, said, and suffered? In the next place: the peculiarity of an agreement, and equally, the peculiarity of a difference, in the witnesses to matters so important as these, should be carefully noted. When the second or third account is read, it should be asked, are the differences adverse to the main fact? Do the witnesses agree in all which I chiefly desire to find true? Lastly, let us learn, to put all the accounts carefully together; and this exercise of an earnest and spiritual patience will go very far towards enabling us to have the most profitable apprehension of the whole.

VERSES 41—48.

Every tear which Jesus shed was as precious a proof of his humanity as every drop of blood which flowed from his wounded side. The latter had the additional value of a redeeming efficacy ; but as a witness to the truth that the word of God had become man, the former was as perfect and convincing as the sublimer instance of his compassion. It is not, however, to be supposed that a mind like that of Jesus could be affected by an inadequate cause of emotion. The fact, therefore, that he wept would of itself be sufficient to convince us that the object which he was contemplating had in it a peculiar solemnity and terror. But when we really behold the spectacle which so deeply moved this wise and majestic being, we can even account for his sorrow. Not only was an ancient and noble city on the verge of destruction, but it was about to perish, under circumstances the most gloomy and appalling. In the very hour when salvation was at its gates, it was finally surrendering itself to reprobation. God had borne with its iniquities from age to age : but his last offer of mercy was greater than all. Jesus felt in the grief of his own heart, and in the further agony that was coming upon him, that hope for the lost city must now cease, and he wept to see that all his mercy had proved vain. When he went into the Temple, and drove out the traffickers from its sacred courts, he proclaimed aloud his reverence for that edifice which it was the desire of his enemies to prove he had profaned. Had the miserable Scribes and Pharisees been really as jealous of the purity of their laws and constitutions as he was, he would never have had cause to weep at the threatened ruin of Jerusalem. The instincts of the common people told them he was right ; and we may reasonably believe that, though some joined in the cry against him in Pilate's judgment hall, many heard him unto salvation.

CHAPTER XX.

VERSES 1—8.

John the Baptist distinctly ascribed to Jesus the authority of heaven. He owned him as the son of God ; he proclaimed him as Messiah. The question, “ by what authority doest thou these things ? ” might have been answered in various ways. Jesus might have referred to his miracles : he might have adduced the confession with which the devils fled from his presence : he might have appealed to the very power of that wisdom by which such multitudes of the most depraved of mankind had been led to renounce their sins. But he contented himself with a humbler species of testimony, He needed not the witness of man ; and in pity to the base and narrow prejudices of those who questioned him, he summoned only the name and character of John the Baptist to his aid. Even this was enough. There was a truth in the appeal which, while it spared the prejudices, might have enlightened the minds of his opponents. A little earnest, honest thought could not have failed to shew them, that the authority which John had ascribed to Jesus just three years prior to the present time, was the authority which God had given his son ; the authority proper to him, in his character and office as Messiah ; and which he was only exercising in its most legitimate form, when he proclaimed that his Father’s house should still be a house of prayer, and not a house of merchandise, or a den of thieves.

VERSES 9—18.

A parable like this must have fallen with the weight of a thunderbolt upon the weak and wretched hypocrites against whom it was directed. But it was not the parable alone which excited their mingled terror and wrath. The double

prophecy which followed added tenfold to its awful force. They beheld the Lord of the vineyard coming to demand of them an account of their crimes : they saw, as in a sudden, dazzling vision, against which they could not effectually close their eyes, the rejected Jesus exalted to the highest state of glory : some they beheld still vainly questioning his right to power, and falling confounded at the foot of his throne : others they saw blasphemously provoking his wrath, till his iron sceptre fell upon them, and ground them to powder.

VERSES 19—26.

The Chief Priests and Scribes had been taught the truth : they understood it, and trembled. But fear has an alternative. It may pass into wrath or into love ; and when it takes the former course, the deeper the sense of rejected truth, the greater is the hatred to its subject, or its author. The destruction of Jesus was resolved on. But there were many difficulties to the accomplishment of such a purpose. He could not be destroyed by open violence. He was surrounded by watchful disciples ; and the mass of the people were, as yet, faithful to their convictions. No distinct accusation could be brought against him. He had broken no law ; violated no proper ordinance of religion ; uttered no treasonable expression. They dare not take him before the Sanhedrim. The result of his appearance there would have been the utter confusion of his accusers ; and even had his condemnation been secured, it could have brought upon him only a punishment far short of death. No way was open for his certain destruction, but to expose him to the sentence of the heathen magistrate. Let him be found guilty of treason to Rome, and his career was at an end. The design of the present question, “ Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or no ? ” was to involve him in a difficulty, escape from which seemed impossible, without, at least, some injury. Suppose that he

should allow that it was lawful to give tribute to the Romans ; then there was a large, popular party, to whom he would immediately become an object of dislike and suspicion : but suppose, on the contrary, that he should deny the lawfulness of giving tribute to a heathen, then he might be instantly accused of treason, and his enemies would have nothing more to do, but simply to give him over to the governor. Jesus saw the snare, and quietly disentangled it. He would, probably, if necessary, have plainly stated, that it was the duty of the people to pay the promised tax : but he took the coin which they had freely adopted, and freely circulated. It was a fact, that all parties had so far pledged themselves to render Cæsar his due. Else why have thus acknowledged his sovereignty ? The inference could offend neither side. Even the most violent patriot must have felt the reasonableness of the answer ; while the keenest of spies could not fail to discover that he might wait long, but must wait in vain, to detect Jesus in uttering a disloyal or unworthy sentiment.

VERSES 27—38.

There is no sufficient reason to suppose, that the Sadducees here spoken of, were influenced by the same motive as the spies, who were to feign themselves just men. The enquiry of the Sadducees was of a speculative and abstruse nature, and had its origin rather in their desire to establish a system of infidelity, than in a base, treacherous wish to destroy Jesus. Their question was ingeniously put ; except that they had forgotten the very important consideration, that no covenant is binding beyond the period for which it is contracted ; and that, by the very nature of things, marriage is an agreement terminable by the death of either party. “As long as ye both shall live” is a sentence, if not in words, yet in spirit, belonging to all marriage promises. In the case mentioned by the Sadducees, the woman was freed by death from each, and all,

of her marriage contracts. But our Lord adds another consideration for removing the difficulty. The new life implies a change of nature. Not only are relationships dissolved, by the termination of the law on which they were founded, but the being who rises from the dead, has undergone a re-creation, and, in putting off the corruptible and perishable, for the incorruptible and eternal, the bonds which united him to earthly natures, must, necessarily, cease to exist. It should always, however, be borne in mind, that this dissolution of unions formed in time, and depending upon the laws of an earthly nature, does not, in any way whatsoever, imply the loss of those unions which depend upon the higher principles of our hearts and souls. As that which is immortal in us will abide through all the changes of the outward or material frame, so no affection, or relation arising from it, which is not accidental to mere earthly life, can suffer injury by changes, which are only intended to purify and elevate our nature. The union of faithful, affectionate, holy hearts, depends upon a principle wholly distinct from the earthly bond, which the resurrection shews dissolved; and the re-union, for ever, of friends above, will be the grand test of the life, and sincerity, of their friendship, upon earth. Our Lord's mention of the case of the patriarchs, would afford some reason to believe that the resurrection is here spoken of in the largest sense; referring, that is, to the present life of departed saints, as subject to the same conditions as those to be universally established at the general resurrection. But the whole debate evidently turns upon the question of a bodily resurrection. The marriage of souls was no theme for the speculation of a Sadducee. We must, therefore, suppose, either that our Lord intended it to be understood, that the present actual and conscious life of the souls of the saints must necessarily be followed by the resurrection of the body; or, that the patriarchs have enjoyed a peculiar mercy; an anti-

cipative exercise of the resurrection power, and are already living unto God, as all the saints will live when the scheme of salvation has been fulfilled.

VERSES 39—47.

Here was an appeal to the unquestionable language of Scripture. David spoke of the Christ, or Messiah, as his Lord. The expression in the 110th Psalm is but one among many in which a mysterious, but sufficiently intelligible allusion is made to the twofold nature of the Redeemer. If it could not have been proved that Jesus was the Son of David, as to the flesh, every believer in prophecy must have rejected his pretensions to the character of Messiah, or Christ. But if on the other hand, it could not have been equally well proved that he was the Son of God, the Lord receiving worship before his incarnation, he could never have established his right to the honour which he claimed as the express image of the Almighty's glory and perfections. No one could explain the passage in the Psalm but on the supposition, that the Christ was to have a twofold nature, human and Divine. The learning and acuteness of the Scribes compelled them to assent to this truth as soon as it was proposed. But our Lord pressed his conquest still further, and with awful severity reminded the people, that the men whose familiarity with the highest truths was known to all the world, were as remarkable for their selfishness and love of gain as for their acquirements and ability.

C H A P T E R X X I .

VERSES 1—4.

A lesson of vast importance is taught the disciples of Christ in the incident here recorded. As a readiness to help the distressed, and to support the cause of God by any means in

our power, is one of the first duties of our calling, so ought it to be performed with the most unostentatious simplicity. If we have much, we should give much, still considering it only as little in comparison with our abundance : if we have little, let us give of that little, not neglecting our duty, because it cannot be done conspicuously, or according to human calculations of the service, but trusting that God will not disregard the proportion of our means, or judge our love according to the necessity which restricts our gifts. The poor woman contributed more than all the wealthy who cast their offerings into the treasure-chest. She gave all she had : they gave but a very small part of what they possessed. But that which imparted so great a value to her contribution was the hearty desire with which she sought God's glory. This saved her from all the pain of a false shame at having so little to give ; and effectually stifled every thought which Satan might suggest as to her being excused from giving because she could not give more. Her example is twofold : that of a large charity with small means ; and of a profound simplicity, not blushing at openly giving the little which she had to bring.

VERSES 5—19.

The events which our Lord thus foretells are now the facts of an ancient history ; of an age cut off from our own times by a gulf in which the mightiest nations lie buried, never to rise again. But we have an interest in the people to whom our Lord's first prophecy applied, which no distance of time can lessen. The forty years which intervened between his prediction and its fulfilment, was one of the most eventful in the history of the world. Every line of the awful picture which he drew, had its counterpart in the reality. The lights and shadows of the one, might be seen in the other, as the Almighty let his countenance shine on the few that were to be saved, and swept over the rest in the cloudy chariot of his wrath. Wars,

earthquakes, famine and plague, did literally fill that terrible forty years with preparatory miseries. Supernatural signs were added to the warning thus given. But what can move the reprobate heart? What can rouse a people to repentance who have determined to resist God's word and spirit? Yet in whatever degree the warning was despised, we may be sure it was given in mercy. The forty year's suspension of judgment was not allowed without the possibility of some good being thereby effected. In that period, though the heart of the nation, as a nation, remained impenitent, thousands of individuals might be brought to acknowledge their guilt, and to avail themselves of the grace of Christ. A remarkable characteristic of our Lord's recital is the mingling of warnings and comforting assurances. The most terrible afflictions, persecutions of every kind, were to assail believers in the Gospel. Some of them would have to suffer death; and yet he speaks of the perfect safety of his people. "Not a hair of their head shall perish." A sublime, and yet most practical truth is the immediate inference. The peace, the security, the triumph over tyrannical power, the life, which God promises and affords his children, are perfectly compatible with a period of the most fearful persecution, and of temporal and bodily suffering. This can only be understood by faith. But it is the discipline of a believer's mind to study these solemn inferences from the word of his master; and there can be no doubt that, did we prepare the heart for the possibly greater trials of our calling, we should be more calm, more dignified, and consistent, when vexed by the lesser, but more frequent, appeals to our Christian principles.

VERSES 20—24.

It would seem to have been almost a useless warning to speak of the approaching destruction of a city when compassed by armies. But however unnecessary such a prophetic warn-

ing might have been in the case of another people, it was eminently needful in that of the Jews. Their impenetrable hardness of heart, and even their desperate courage, rendered the prophecy necessary. Even those who had accepted the Gospel, might still partake of the latter quality of the nation; and in their indomitable resolution might still have hoped that, though encompassed by armies, Jerusalem might be spared. Convinced by the words of their master, the disciples of Christ could not fail to see that their only hope of safety must depend upon making provision for their flight; and that in proportion to their weakness and necessities must be their care and foresight. Jerusalem was sentenced; and the devoted city must lie prostrate in the dust, till God shall have fulfilled his purposes of mercy to all mankind. When the cycle of his providences shall be so completed, we may then look for the resurrection of Jerusalem, but probably as we expect that of man: it perished as an earthly city, it shall rise a spiritual city; it fell in dishonour, it shall re-appear in glory.

VERSES 25—33.

Were it not for the necessary connection of this passage with the preceding, we should at once apply it to the final coming of Christ. Following, as it does, upon prophecies which are marked by circumstances only proper to temporal distress, the whole may be more safely regarded as predictive of the end of the Jewish commonwealth. But this in no wise lessens the worth or solemnity of the warning to us of a later day. If such was the awful admonition given to those who might witness the final judgment on a reprobate nation, what ought to be our preparation for that greatest of events, the end of the world itself, and of which we cannot fail to be spectators, whatever intermediate changes may have passed upon us?

VERSES 34—38.

Our Lord seems to have finished his prophecy with the general declaration, that it rests on firmer foundations than either earth or heaven. In that which follows He warns us against the three classes of vice which most commonly blind men to the future; and which can only be effectually resisted by the constant exercise of prayer and watchfulness, the appointed means of grace, because the nearest and readiest way of keeping the soul consciously dependent upon God.

CHAPTER XXII.

VERSES 1—6.

The example of Judas teaches us, that, however wicked a man may be, Satan has a further work to do in urging him to a particular crime. Sinfulness is the common character of our nature. It is in the eye of Satan a species of power, but it acts only generally and at random, till he or the world direct it to this or that class of objects. The evil disposition of Judas had an intensity in it which at once pointed him out for a deed of great consequence and enormity. Satan would intrust the guidance of such a power to no inferior agent. He himself entered his heart; just as some skilful commander of a fleet would himself wish to be in the ship on the skilful conduct of which the issue of the battle must depend.

VERSES 7—18.

There are some peculiarities in the present narrative, as distinguished from the accounts of the preceding Evangelists, which, though minute, it will well repay a thoughtful reader to observe. Not, however, as belonging to these slighter differences, but as a most precious addition to the history, must we regard the report of our Lord's words, "With desire

I have desired to eat this Passover with you," &c. He had some time before expressed himself in corresponding language: "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" Chap. xii. 50. In both cases it was the expression of his vehement desire to accomplish the purpose of his incarnation; but a distinction may be made between the two allusions. The baptism which he contemplated, was that through which he must pass to wash away the sins of the world; a baptism of blood; a baptism which would bury him, for the time, in the fiery flood of Divine wrath. As he looked forward to this, knowing that it must be accomplished, he was straitened, bound, and pressed in all the faculties and affections of his human nature, wishing that the terrible hour for that baptism were come, that it might be the sooner passed. But, in the allusion to the Passover, a very different set of objects arose to view. The results of his sufferings; the marriage supper; the assembly of his faithful people at the banquet-table in his Father's kingdom; these were the cheering and beautiful visions which presented themselves to his mind, as he sat down to eat that Passover with his disciples. In this case, therefore, he does not say, "How am I straitened," but uses the strongest form that language could supply to express hopefulness and desire. That was to be the last administration of the ancient, typical Passover, as far as it had any proper meaning. But at the spiritual feast, which was to take its place, Christ is again present with his disciples, eating bread and drinking wine with them in the kingdom of God. The cup which he first took, and then gave to his disciples, was that which the chief person at the paschal feast blessed, and passed round, before the actual commencement of the chief solemnity.

VERSES 19—23.

St. Luke contents himself with reporting the words of our Lord, as far as they concerned the disciples then present; but the other Evangelists especially record that he said his blood was shed "for many." Had we possessed no other narrative than St. Luke's, it could scarcely have been supposed that the Apostles only were to be benefited by the blood of Jesus; but in a matter of such infinite importance, it is a blessing to find all uncertainty set aside; all doubts removed. "It is shed for you," may every faithful company of Christ's disciples hear him saying: but let them still listen, and they will hear "For the many" also. St. Matthew and St. Mark report our Lord's words, on giving the cup, in this form, "This is my blood of the New Testament," testament being equivalent to covenant. St. Luke reports them thus, "This cup is the New Testament in my blood." The same form is repeated by St. Paul, 1 Corin. xi. 25. The actual words which our Lord uttered in Syriac, might admit equally of either form. This is the great truth of both: that the new covenant of grace and salvation is established by his blood. That he should see the hand of the betrayer with him on the table, as he spoke of these things, was, as if a victim at the altar had its eye upon the knife which was to slay it. Judas heard the woe pronounced upon him; but he heard in vain; so little avails even the voice of Jesus, when a sin is resolutely purposed.

VERSES 24—30.

It seems strange that the Apostles should have been able, at such a time as this, to engage in selfish and ambitious wrangling. To get rid of the difficulty, some commentators have suggested, that St. Luke may have here accidentally inserted the account of a circumstance which occurred at an

earlier period. But such modes of lessening difficulties should never be employed, when not absolutely necessary. And in this case they are certainly not required. Our Lord had spoken of a kingdom : he had alluded to triumphs and festivities ; and though his followers had mistaken the sublimer meaning of his words, he had, no doubt, the merciful intention of exalting their hearts to a cheerful, happy feeling of the glory to which they would ultimately attain. When men, not as yet under the power of the Holy Spirit, began to converse among themselves, on themes of this kind, how natural it was that human ambition should arise, and suggest to them motives for desiring the personal favour of their Lord. That there was no great malignancy in the feeling thus excited, may be concluded from the mildness with which they were rebuked. Though reminded that he who should be the humblest, and the most unselfish among them, would be most like his master, they were assured that a glory awaited them, which, rightly understood, must infinitely surpass the largest grasp of the most ambitious intellect that ever formed plans, or indulged in visions, of future empire. It is disrespectful to Scripture, and especially to our Lord, to set aside the meaning of what is said, by a vague notion that it is wholly metaphorical. We may not, till hereafter, be able to understand what the twelve thrones of the twelve apostles are ; but we may be quite sure that they will prove a sublime reality among the other substantial splendours of that kingdom of glory which will succeed the kingdom of grace.

VERSES 31—38.

Circumstances, and a discourse, like the present, were calculated to excite all the ardour of Simon Peter's bold, and generous spirit. Jesus saw the working of his thoughts, and warned him of his danger. The folly of self-confident enthusiasm could not be more forcibly exemplified. Proud as was

the boast of firmness and devotion, it proved miserably false: quiet as the warning, it proved eminently true. A connection, though not at first obvious, may be traced between the warning given to Peter, and the following general address to the Apostles. Peter was confident as to his courage. The rest of the Apostles may have been as ready to shew their willingness to endure any of the privations likely to be the consequence of their devotion to Jesus. Hunger and thirst, the toils of a life spent in preaching the Gospel to those who would resent the proffered mercy by persecution and insult, these were the sufferings, which in that hour of deep emotion, presented themselves to the minds of the Apostles as servants of Christ, and which they believed themselves prepared to endure. To check unfortified zeal, our Lord recalled their thoughts to the real circumstances of their position. They had felt how well he could sustain them. But they were no longer to be supported by his miraculous interposition. Faith, itself, would have no exercise, if it were always to be followed by miracles. Hence Jesus instructed his Apostles that they were, henceforth, as far as they were personally concerned, to provide against common wants and common dangers by common means. His short answer to the exclamation, "Lord, here are two swords," shews that he only intended to convey a general lesson. The sword was, at that time, a very usual appendage of dress, especially in the case of travellers; and as he, himself, was soon to be taken away, he desired his followers, like all other men, to be guarded against the ordinary necessities and dangers of the world. Peter's over-weaning enthusiasm was reproved in one way: the idea of the rest that they might be fed, or guarded by a miracle, was checked in another.

VERSES 39—46.

Gethsemane was at the foot of the Mount of Olives. When Jesus said to his disciples, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation," he was not giving a mere general instruction, but was speaking, from the then growing sufferings of his own heart. He felt how it needed all his mighty resolution, all the arguments which his unqualified love to his Father, and his mercy to mankind could supply, to enable him to endure temptation. As the terrors of the approaching trial became more and more distinctly appreciable, so much the more earnest became his prayers. There was an awful and tumultuous strife between feeling and duty; but in the midst of the conflict the will remained settled, and untouched; subject as ever to the supreme will of the Father, and calm in its subjection. It had accepted the decree, the terms of the covenant, by which the world was to be saved, if the Son of God became a propitiation for its sins. But while the will remained unmovable as a rock, every feeling and passion was against it, and in proportion to its firmness was the agony of the conflict it sustained. Jesus felt, reasoned, and prayed as man, when he desired, if possible, that the cup of such bitter grief might be taken away. He would have wanted something proper to humanity had he not wished to be spared, if possible, such thickening horrors. His desire to escape the suffering could not be granted: but we have a most comforting and eminent proof in his example, that, while God, in carrying on his plans, may lay the heaviest burdens upon his children, and will not spare them till his purposes have been accomplished, he will not fail to render them support sufficient for the occasion. And this instructs us in a very important principle of the Divine economy. For we hence learn that, though some great design may render it absolutely necessary that the good should suffer, the success of the design may not,

by any means, require that they should be left without consolation. Thus, while Christ was sweating great drops of blood in the agony of a suffering which could not be spared him, it was not inconsistent with the fulfilment of the object for which he endured such distress, that God should send an angel to uphold and strengthen him. The weakness and slumber of the three chosen disciples, overcome by sorrow, were in strange contrast to the profound self-possession of the sufferer. Well might they be taught to pray against temptation !

VERSES 47—53.

The preceding Evangelists have not recorded the question, so full of pathos as well as severity, “Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?” Nor the healing of the High Priest’s servant; each, in its way, throwing light upon the minutest features of our Lord’s character, and incidentally adding to the amount of Christian evidence. We learn from such additional circumstances, the fulness of the stores from which the Evangelists drew their information ; and cannot help feeling that, had we a history as large and circumstantial as might have been given us, the most subtle doubt must have yielded to the broad light shining from the clear and ample page. But as it is, we have much more than at first sight strikes the eye ; and the exercise of enquiry, of observation, and comparison, is more likely to strengthen faith, than any amount of information, not exciting attention, is likely to create it. Our Lord’s rebuke must have convinced Judas of his guilt, but does it not equally convince the reader of the truth of all the attendant circumstances ? Who could have invented such an incident, or adapted it with such nicety to both characters, had there not been reality for the groundwork ? In two out of the three histories it is omitted. It was not, therefore, regarded by the Evangelists as of great importance. Its value has increased by distance ; many

historical incidents being of comparative little worth to those who lived near the time when they happened, but becoming, in proportion to their very minuteness, of vast consequence to the readers of a distant age. The same remark is applicable to the healing of the High Priest's servant. Neither Matthew nor Mark mentions it. The power and benevolence of Jesus were sufficiently known, without this further instance of their exercise. But as we now look back upon it, the tranquil self-possession, the cautious regard for his disciples, his tenderness for the most active of his enemies, are all strikingly illustrated by this incident so briefly recorded by only one of the Evangelists. The language, in which, amid all the tumult by which he was surrounded, Jesus addressed the Chief Priests, and others, gives further proof of the undisturbed dignity of his conduct. They were hurried, excited, full of strange alarm. To apprehend a man who had walked openly among them for three years, and who had done nothing to the last but what he had done at first, they found it necessary to employ all the resources, both of their station, and their cunning. Even with their best means, they were evidently doubtful of success; and when our Lord told them that it was by the power of darkness only they could prevail, they must, doubtless, have felt that he knew the secrets of their hearts.

VERSES 54—62.

One Evangelist may be made the interpreter of another in most of the circumstances connected with the last scene of our Lord's ministry. Thus a more particular account is given by St. John of what took place immediately after the apprehension of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. It is that of an eye-witness, and of one writing, not only according to what he recollects, but with the most vivid feelings of awe and affection. His narrative should be compared throughout

with those of the other Evangelists, not merely for the additional incidents which it contains, but for the help which it gives to a due appreciation of the pathos of the history. There are, however, particulars in each, and those of a very interesting kind, not to be found in the others. St. Luke gives us no account of the effort made before the High Priest to prove Jesus guilty by means of the false witnesses ; but, as a curious instance of exactness, he tells us that Jesus heard Peter's last and loudest denial of him, and turned and looked upon him. This is surely a very precious testimony to the care with which the eye-witnesses, on whom Luke depended, recorded their observations. In this case, it was, no doubt, Peter, himself, who first related the circumstance. That he went out and wept bitterly, may have been especially noted by St. John, who was sufficiently near at hand to see him as he left the place, and behold his distress.

VERSES 63—71.

The proceedings during the night, could scarcely be regarded as judicial ; and even those which took place in the morning, before the Sanhedrim, had no higher character than that of a preliminary enquiry. This may account for the brevity with which St. Luke describes them. Pilate only could condemn Jesus to a capital punishment, and all that the Chief Priests could do, was, to convince themselves, and others, that they were justified in committing Jesus to the tribunal of the governor. To the question, "Art thou the Christ?" they received no distinct answer : but to the still higher enquiry "Art thou the Son of God," they received a direct and distinct reply, idiomatically expressed, in the affirmative. To have answered to the former only would have led to countless questions on the law, the prophets, and tradition : the reply to the latter, at once appeared to justify the course which Jesus, knowing that his hour was come, patiently expected them to adopt.

CHAPTER XXIII.

VERSES 1—12.

It is worthy of observation, that, though fresh from the Sanhedrim, and from the discussion of a question purely religious, the enemies of Jesus keeping silence on such subjects, proceeded immediately to accuse him of a political offence. The crime which they imputed to him was very definitely stated. It was treason in its three worst forms of operation. But Pilate was too keen a judge to be easily deceived in so grave a matter. The guilt, or innocence, of Jesus, must evidently depend upon the manner in which he represented himself as a king. St. Luke tells us no further than that to the question, “Art thou a King?” he answered in the affirmative. But had not Pilate understood more by that reply than the words literally convey, he would certainly not have said “I find no fault in this man.” He would have been obliged, without further delay, to punish the accused as a traitor to the Roman government. It may, therefore, be concluded, that he received the saying of Jesus as Jesus meant it to be received, that is, as referring to a kingdom which had no resemblance to the kingdoms of this world, and the sovereignty of which might therefore be assumed without any degree of unfaithfulness to earthly potentates. Thus the definite, substantial accusation altogether failed. For the moment, the only resource left was a loose, general assertion, that Jesus by his preaching had stirred up the people to rebellion. But this was alike unsuccessful. Pilate still acted with becoming judgment and decision. He saw through the wicked sophistry of those who were plotting the destruction of Jesus; and Galilee being mentioned, he gladly seized upon the pretence of law to save himself from further trouble, and probably to save Jesus from the hands of his most implac-

able enemies. Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Galilee, had already expressed his wish to see Jesus ; and, had he pleased, he might now have employed his power to protect him, as his subject, from the persecution of the priests. But his pride and curiosity were alike disappointed by the silence of Jesus. He could see nothing in the dignified mien of the sufferer, but what provoked him to heap fresh insults on his head. Still, wicked and unjust as was his conduct in this respect, he tacitly acknowledged that Jesus had done nothing worthy of death ; and he accordingly sent him back to Pilate, having no wish to involve himself in a question of law, which it was becoming more and more difficult to solve. The reconciliation between Herod and Pilate, in consequence of this transaction, has no doubt its spiritual significance. It would not have been recorded, had it been without a meaning in this respect. The indifference with which they both regarded Jesus himself, while each was ready to employ, or sacrifice, him for some selfish end, may be intended for a common type of the mode in which worldly potentates devote Jesus, his gospel, his ministers, and his church, to their earthly aims.

VERSES 13—25.

According to St. Luke's narrative it was by clamour only that the enemies of Jesus secured his condemnation. But on referring to St. John's Gospel, we find that the Priests having failed in making good their original charge of treason, and being as signally defeated in their more boisterous accusations, had now recourse to what was more properly within their jurisdiction. They now, that is, brought forth the charge of blasphemy. To Pilate's question, " Why, what evil hath he done," they replied, " We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God." This at least gave some colour to the infamous choice of Barabbas rather than Jesus. Frightful as were the crimes

of the former, the sin of Jesus, had he not indeed been the Son of God, would have been incomparably greater. Pilate hesitated to condemn Jesus even on this charge. Not only was he awed by the mystery, which now, more than ever, attended Jesus, but he had the same doubt respecting the nature of the offence, as he had when Jesus was accused of making himself a king. In the one case, as well as in the other, Pilate felt that there was something with which he had no authority to deal, and that whatever step he took, it would be taken in the dark. Unhappily for him, he could not resist the dread of exciting against himself the fierce and gloomy spirits, which he saw resolved on the destruction of Jesus. He surrendered the innocent victim to his murderers. Terrible was the retribution which followed his base and heartless crime.

VERSES 26—33.

Were it not for the statement in St. John, "And he bearing his cross went forth," we might have supposed that it was put upon Simon at first, the language of all the other Evangelists intimating that our Lord had scarcely left the judgment hall when Simon was seen passing by, and compelled to take up the cross. The probability, therefore, is that though the cross, or the transverse beam, was at first laid upon Jesus, and he went forth with it, his bowed form and trembling steps, exhaustion having done its worst upon his physical frame, soon proved that he would never reach Golgotha without assistance. The laying hold upon Simon, a stranger accidentally passing by, and the instant transfer of the cross to his shoulders, were the acts, probably, of some impatient soldier, enraged at finding himself, and his companions, delayed in an affair, to them of very common occurrence, and great insignificance. Generous and exquisite was the tenderness with which Jesus sought to divert the grief of

the women of Jerusalem from his sorrows, to those which were to come upon themselves and their children. It was as unnatural that he, altogether just and innocent, should thus be led to an ignominious death, as it would be to cut down a green tree, and cast it into the fire. But if this could be done, what horrors might not be expected when a guilty nation was to be tried and punished according to its deserts? A Roman governor could be found ready to consign, from mere policy and expediency, a righteous man to the cross: what was not to be looked for when the mightiest captains, with the whole force of Rome, should appear at the gates of Jerusalem with an acknowledged purpose of vengeance? The crucifixion of the two malefactors with Jesus was the fulfilment of a remarkable prophecy, but, probably, no intentional addition, on the part of the Roman executioners, to the ignominy of his death. The unhappy men had been appointed to die, and they were carried forth, as a matter of course, when occasion served. This adds greatly to the force of the argument derived from the fulfilment of prophecy. The agents acted in obedience to circumstance or duty, as far as man was concerned, but blindly in regard to God.

VERSES 34—38.

Our Lord's words, "They know not what they do," may have referred to the whole assembled multitude of his persecutors: but it is not evident that we ought to give them such an extensive application. The Jewish priests; the Scribes and Pharisees were, in many respects, quite aware of what they did. Pilate, the Roman soldiers, and some of the rudest of the multitude, could not know what they were about in the same way as the chief men among the Jews must, had they chosen to think, have discovered the real character of the present proceeding. Though our Lord may have desired mercy to be shewn the latter, yet when he spoke of those

who knew not what they did, it is scarcely to be supposed that he referred to men whose guilt was enormous, chiefly because they sinned against light, knowledge, and conviction. In the very taunt which they uttered, "let him save himself," there was an expression of feeling which shewed that they had till now been uncertain of their course, and then it was only when they saw Jesus on the cross, and concluded that his death was an infallible proof of their victory, that they dare really defy his power. They had no idea of the mystery of redemption. The sufferings of Jesus were unconnected in their minds with any thing but weakness and misery. That he did not save himself by coming down from the cross, was equally in their minds, as in the notion of the thief crucified with him, a proof that they had successfully confuted his pretensions to the character of Messiah.

VERSES 39—45.

The repentance or confession of the one malefactor was not a circumstance, apparently, of public concern; and may, therefore, have been passed over by the other Evangelists not because they were unacquainted with it, but because they did not regard it as of sufficient general importance to insert in their history. The Holy Spirit seems to have permitted this conclusion of their understanding. The common evidence which the rancorous spirit of the one malefactor gave to the power of falsehood and iniquity, was of more importance to the general scope of the history than the single exception, however otherwise remarkable and interesting. Looking, however, at the incident in itself, it is eminently calculated to excite both our sympathy and our hopes. The poor culprit may have long before thought of Jesus, and acknowledged him; but we have no authority whatever for saying that he did: and it is always safest to take the incidents of Scripture as they stand. Here, then, we have a case in which sovereign mercy acted

immediately, and in its highest form ; a poor sinner was pardoned, accepted as a believer, owned as a companion of Jesus, and assured of undelayed blessedness. Can we fail to rejoice with him ? Can we fail to hope, on the condition of faith, that the sinner, though late the confession, may be saved ? The least reflection must shew that this affords no encouragement to the man who delays repentance with the thought that he may repent at last. The case of the penitent thief is that of an ascertained, of an effected repentance, with a faith known to have followed it. When a man proposes to repent, he cannot tell whether his purpose will ever be fulfilled ; and under the best possible circumstances a mere proposal to repent can never place a sinner in the same case with the man who is known to have repented. In reality, no two states of mind can be more opposite than that of a person lamenting that he ever sinned, and that of one who thinks that he may lament hereafter. In the former case, sin is regarded as an evil ; in the latter, as a good, not to be parted with till it become an evil. Whether it ever will, is a matter of doubt in the mind of a man who delays repentance ; and as he thinks it uncertain whether sin will be to him what it is said to be to others, so the idea of a future repentance is altogether vague and unreal. But this uncertainty as to a future repentance has nothing whatever to do with a repentance already ascertained. The repentance of a man on the bed of death ought in no wise to encourage a man in health to suppose that he may live to repent ; but the failure of a thousand men hoping to repent when they are dying, ought not to make us doubt respecting the pardon of the man who has acknowledged his sins with his last breath, and with the same breath truly confessed his trust in the merits of the Lord Jesus. We must not let the warning we would give to sinners, darken the light which God sheds upon the convert. There are other considerations of great interest connected with this occur-

rence. To the prayer, "Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," our Lord answered, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Thus, we ascertain a close connection between the kingdom of Christ and Paradise ; and between his own entrance into power, and the exaltation of his followers. The "to-day" intimated an immediate triumph over death. Our Lord knew that these words of his could never be lost ; and it is not to be supposed that he would have spoken of a "to-day" which was, in reality, to be a period of many thousand years. The obvious meaning is, no doubt, the true one. He intended to convey the penitent, as to his whole inward and essential being, with him into Paradise, and that without delay. And from this case we may conclude, that such is the method pursued with all who have repented of sin, and become believers in Christ. Let them but die in him, and the day they leave the earth they are with him in Paradise, that province of his kingdom which borders immediately on that which he has established in the present world. There is a peculiar force in the circumstance, that when he had finished this last work of his ministry, the darkness began to shroud him from view ; his agony grew apace ; while the covenant of nature, by the clouding of the sun, and the covenant of the law, by the rending of the veil, received their sentence of dissolution at the very moment when the redeeming sufferings of the appointed sacrifice were thus fulfilled and perfected.

VERSES 46—56.

The first meaning of the loud voice is given by St. Matthew. St. Luke's narrative refers only to the second utterance, with which Jesus resigned his spirit into the hands of his Father. This constituted his death, which, however terrible in itself, or in its accompaniments, was necessarily a means of glory, if it was the main circumstance which enabled him to re-ascend, in

Spirit, to heaven. And, in this light, death must be a gain to every follower of Christ. The moment which dissolves the union between body and soul, conveys the latter to glory; to commend the Spirit to God, being to re-unite it with the very author of life and blessedness, if the expression, "I commend myself," be justified by a previous surrender of the will, answering to that by which Jesus had declared, "I came not to do mine own will, but the will of him who sent me." It should be carefully observed, that the centurion glorified God in confessing that Jesus was a righteous man. That acknowledgment was itself praise to God. It was a confession of the truth as proclaimed both by the Father and the Son. Jesus being, indeed, a righteous man, the goodness and wisdom of God were revealed through him in their noblest forms. As righteous, he was true, and hence as he promised pardon and peace to sinners, so God's mercy was thereby more clearly made known to mankind than at any other period, or by any other means. As righteous, and yet suffering, the wisdom of God was glorified in him, the method thus taken to satisfy the demands of Divine justice, depending upon the perfect righteousness of the sacrifice, which, though as yet not, perhaps, fully or distinctly understood by the centurion, lay at the root of his incipient faith. The mass of the people were affected with mysterious fears. They felt that a sin had been perpetrated, in which they were nationally concerned. No light appears to have fallen upon them revealing the salvation purchased by the death of Jesus. His loving, weeping disciples must have been under the influence of very different feelings. Indignation at the enormous wickedness which had been displayed; a sense of destitution at the loss of Jesus; unspeakable wretchedness, whenever the thought arose that they might never again see him; and then the sudden recollection of his wonderful assurances that he would return to his people, all these elements of emotion mingling together

constituted a state of mind which doubtless the Holy Spirit overruled, so as to render it a fitting preparation for the joy and triumph which were to follow that brief season of darkness. The care taken of the body of Jesus might have been the result of mere affection; but faith in the great mystery connected with it, reverence for its royalty as that of the great King, of the anointed one, had, at least, as large a share in the conduct of Joseph of Arimathæa, and the devout women, as natural love and tenderness.

CHAPTER X X I V.

VERSES 1—12.

The present account of the resurrection is slightly different from that given by the previous Evangelists. But they agree in all points proper to the grand event itself. Matthew and Mark speak of only one angel: Luke and John of two. There may, indeed, have been a host of angels in close attendance upon the sepulchre, though not visibly. The one or two who appeared to the women, performed an act of tender homage to their piety. Had the account which the soldiers gave been handed down, we should have heard not of the one or two, but of a band of these glorious beings. Most of the apparent discrepancies of Gospel history may be accounted for, and satisfactorily explained, by our bearing in mind, that there were many witnesses of all the main events in our Lord's progress; and that it was, in all probability, the especial work of the Divine Spirit to enable each class of these witnesses to keep in mind, and afterwards to relate, the circumstances which they had more particularly noted, so that when the whole should be brought together, there might be an all-sufficient support for every fact of any real importance to the faith of Christians. This remark will apply also to St. Luke's insertion of a question by one of the angels, but which is not

reported in the other Gospels. "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" There is no reason whatever why this question should not have been asked, at the same time that the other gracious words of comfort and encouragement were uttered; but these were the words which made deepest impression upon the minds of the witness chiefly consulted by St. Luke.

VERSES 13—24.

Emmaus being above seven miles distant from Jerusalem, the two disciples had probably more in view than a mere afternoon ramble, when they determined on visiting that village. Cleopas is said to be identical with Alphæus: who the other disciple was is uncertain. One or the other may have had friends at Emmaus; but it is quite possible that they only obeyed an anxious, excited state of mind, in leaving Jerusalem for a long, solitary walk. Expectation had risen to its highest point. There, doubt and hope balanced each other; and whatever be the subject of thought, in such moods of feeling, any suggestion is adopted which may give greater liberty of communion with those who are interested like ourselves. There was something peculiar in the dispositions of these two disciples. They had not made all the use they might have done of ancient Scripture. In this respect, they were "fools and slow of heart;" but they had also refused the testimony of those who were early at the sepulchre, and who positively announced the resurrection of Jesus. Yet, with all this disbelief, they were animated by the most intense desire to find the reports which they rejected true; and, though they stopped short in the study of Moses and the Prophets, at the point where the Messiah is revealed as a suffering Redeemer, they had so far triumphed over the offence of his cross, as still to proclaim Jesus a prophet mighty in deed and word. It was in correspondence with

this defect of faith that their eyes were holden ; but it was no less in answer to their simplicity, earnestness, and love to Jesus, that he now joined them on their way, and instructed their understanding by Scripture and its exposition as preparatory to a greater act of illuminating grace.

VERSES 25—32.

When taught by Jesus, himself, how surprised must these two disciples have felt at finding so much respecting him in Scripture, of which they had hitherto no knowledge. But their case is not unlike that of many in our later day. We may set out on our journey doubtful, prejudiced, misapprehending the most necessary doctrines of salvation ; but Jesus pities our perplexity ; and though he come not in the same manner as that in which he came to the early disciples, he comes to us effectually, when first, providentially, he puts us in the way of sound instruction ; gives us the Bible, and faithful, experienced, earnest expositors ; and when, directly, he bestows upon us his Holy Spirit, and by him, leads us immediately, to the understanding of his word. Being thus instructed, we cannot but feel astonished at the hitherto undiscovered riches of Scripture ; at the numberless proofs which they afford of the wisdom, goodness, and love of God, revealed especially in Jesus, but of which, till now, we had scarcely any apprehension. Jesus would have gone further, had not the entreaties of the disciples detained him. A solemn lesson is taught by this beautiful incident. The Saviour ever pursues his unseen, mysterious path. But we find him near us : his grace penetrates our hearts. He mercifully goes with us, still letting us seek our homely ends and purposes. We feel the comfort of his companionship ; but at length we reach some stage in our journey : we have gained some desired object ; satisfied with this, we may cease to care about Jesus : it may seem to us that we know enough. If so, he

will pass on : but if, on the contrary, we feel that no repose, no species of enjoyment, can confer complete satisfaction without him, and we pray accordingly, "Abide with us :" then, whatever his other designs, or whithersoever his further path may lead him, he will never leave us till he have blessed for us the bread of life, and opened our eyes, and convinced us, beyond all question, that he has risen from the dead to be the Saviour of them that believe. The feeling with which the disciples asked each other, "Did not our heart burn within us?" answers to some of the finest points of Christian experience. It is both a happy and a profitable circumstance for us, when we can recollect instances in which our hearts were impressed with a peculiarly fervid joy in the study of Scripture. If we be not unfaithful to our experience, we may be sure there are greater things to come.

VERSES 33—35.

Whatever the object for which Cleopas and his companion had come to Emmaus, it was lost sight of in the overwhelming sensations which followed the discovery that it was Jesus who had been walking and conversing with them. Their first impulse was to hasten back to Jerusalem, and tell their brethren the astounding news. Not a thought entered their minds that they could have no more right to demand belief in their story, than the women and others who had been early at the tomb, had a right to expect belief in theirs. But this is a common error in men's judgment of evidence, and especially in that of the Gospel. The greatest infidel that could be found, would be startled if he could be made to see how thoroughly he is convinced that he, himself, ought to be believed, and then, that the evidence which he thus instinctively feels to be sufficient on his own part, is multiplied or enlarged to infinity in the case of Christianity, and yet is rejected. Wonderful must have been the joy with which each

party heard the announcement of the other. The Lord is risen! The Lord is risen, indeed!

VERSES 36—48.

No intelligence could be more precious than that which the two disciples had to communicate to their brethren. In some respects, it must have greatly exceeded in interest that which Peter and the women brought. The latter could speak, indeed, of the all-important fact that they had seen, and even spoken with the Lord; but Cleopas and his companion had enjoyed his long and patient discourse; they had still in their hearts not only the feeling of joy with which he inspired them; but the substantial gifts of knowledge and wisdom; they had eaten the bread which he blessed and brake; and were witness to the mysterious power with which he could be present with them, in the body, and vanish as a spirit. It seems, by the wording of the passage, that it was at the moment when the disciples were meditating on this latter circumstance, that Jesus appeared in the midst of them, as if he intended at once to prove the truth of the narrative in that important particular. Important it was; for had he not demonstrated, that a wonderful change had been wrought in his body by death, and that it was now superior to many of the influences which before controlled his movements, a low, imperfect idea might have been formed of his present condition; and the chief mystery involved in the resurrection might have become a matter of doubt, just in proportion to the increasing conviction of his bodily presence. There was this danger on the one side; and it was met by the proofs which he gave of his power to appear and to depart when and as he pleased. But that there was an opposite danger is shewn by the terrors of the disciples supposing that they saw a spirit, when he suddenly appeared. This notion did not vanish immediately. His living and distinct voice was not

sufficient to convince them of his bodily presence; nor was it till they had looked at his hands and his feet, and even handled him, that they were fully satisfied of their error. How merciful was his conduct, in all these respects, not only to those his first disciples, but to us also! How full of consolation is the certainty thus given to the fact of the resurrection, each of the familiar proofs by which the truth itself is established, throwing a flood of light upon the mysterious processes through which we are ourselves to pass into a higher state of nature. Prepared by such converse, it must have been with equal awe and thankfulness that the disciples received the intimation that all nations were to obtain mercy through him, and that they themselves, being made partakers of a Divine power, were to be the first messengers of this great salvation.

VERSES 50—53.

St. Luke closes his narrative with great brevity, omitting any mention of the events which intervened between the different appearances of our Lord, and his ascension. But the incidents which he here mentions are a noble sequel to his inestimably precious record. They shew the tenderness of Jesus; his sympathy with human thought and feeling; for what else was likely to induce him to lead his followers out as far as Bethany, but that he might awaken in their hearts a joyful feeling of the difference between their prospects now, when they had a master risen from the dead, and preparing for glory, and their prospects then, when he could only speak to them of the cross. And how full of consolation is the circumstance, that even as he entered into glory he was employed in blessing them; that blessing, in fact, forming a link between the blessings given on earth, and those which come down from heaven. That he thus ascended

was a crown of glory to the faith of his chosen witnesses. Well might they worship him! Well might they return full of joy to Jerusalem! Of all worshippers that could now be seen in the temple, were there any that could equal them in giving glory to God in the highest?

END OF THE GOSPEL OF ST. LUKE.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN.

INTRODUCTION.

It is the uniform statement of ancient authors, that St. John wrote his Gospel at a much later period than the other three Evangelists; and that he composed it with the two-fold design of supplying portions of our Lord's history which they had omitted, or but lightly touched upon; and of exhibiting more definitely the doctrine of his godhead, the teaching of which was now rendered especially necessary by the heresies of Cerinthus, the Nicolaitanes, and others. Different dates are assigned to this Gospel; but most writers agree in believing that it was composed towards the end of St. John's life, and therefore about the close of the first century. He had then been long resident at Ephesus, where he was acknowledged as the venerable head of the churches of Asia Minor, and where he died in peace, the last survivor of that wonderful and favoured band of men, who had been chosen by Jesus to be with him, first in his temptation, and then in his glory.

The Gospel of St. John is remarkable for its full and profound exhibition of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel. It is from the words of Christ, and the dictation of the blessed Spirit, that the knowledge thus communicated is derived; but we see that the writer, himself, rejoiced in the wisdom of which he was the appointed channel. His own character, therefore, was of the highest and most spiritual class. It had been framed by early gifts of grace, and the teaching and example of Jesus. The Holy Spirit had descended upon him in common with the other Apostles, and by the time he sat down to the composition of his Gospel, he had the rich experience of more than sixty years of the Christian life, marked by successes, persecutions, revelations, each tending to give him a deeper insight into the work of God. It can be no wonder that the writing of a man so taught is found enriched with the grandest displays of heavenly truth.

St. John's Gospel.



CHAPTER I.

VERSES 1—5.

An earnest, and devout consideration, of this sublime passage, introduces the mind, in the most fitting manner, to the study of the whole Gospel. Let it be well understood, that it was the Word of God, in the flesh, who spoke and acted, as it is here recorded, and though this is, itself, the greatest of wonders, it throws the light of intelligible truth upon every point of the narrative. “The Logos,” to which our English, “The Word,” strictly corresponds, was anciently adopted by the Greek philosophical writers, to signify a certain Divine agency; and that, not as an attribute, as wisdom, power, or justice, but as a proper emanation of Deity. But, as in every other case of such words, the meaning attached to it was more or less definite, of a simpler or more recondite character, according to the particular opinions of the writer who employed it. Our own expression, “The Word,” admits of the same variety of meaning; and the English reader is, in this respect, on a level with the scholar. Of the sense in which St. John uses the term, we can only properly judge by paying careful attention to the design and substance of his Gospel. Let it be clearly understood that “The Word,” in itself, means just as much as “The Logos,” and that the precise sense of either term is determined, as far as his writings are concerned, by the author who uses it, and the earnest, prayerful reader, may then sit down to the study of this wonderful portion of Scripture, with the assurance that the doctrine of St. John is fully within the reach of his understanding. Why this particular

title, “The Word,” should be applied to “the only begotten of the Father,” may be thus explained. A word expresses the idea, the feeling, or will, of him who utters it. Whatever, therefore, most distinctly declares the mind of a person, is pre-eminently his word, or bears the same relation to his thoughts, as words usually bear to the thoughts of others. Now it is, by his only begotten Son, that God has ever declared his will to mankind: it is through him, “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person,” that he reveals himself. Hence the “Word of the Father,” and the “only begotten of the Father,” are equivalent terms, the former embodying in one name all the titles proper to the Son as performing and declaring the will of God; and the latter shewing the personal nature and Divine glory of this great utterer and demonstrator of the Eternal wisdom, power and goodness. Knowing this, we readily understand how that the word was “in the beginning;” that is, existing when things began to be, and therefore before all things, or from eternity. That he was with God is necessarily implied in his being the word of God, that is, the ever present, and ever ready expounder of his will. That he was God, that is, an essential partaker of the Divine nature, may be equally learnt, from his name, “the Word,” it being absolutely impossible that any mere creature, however exalted, should be fitted to fathom, and then to express and execute the whole of the Almighty’s will, which, did it fail through the insufficiency of “the Word,” or the medium of its expression, would itself be defeated. That “the same was in the beginning with God” is not stated as a mere repetition of the first sentence, “In the beginning was the word.” The “with God” is a most important addition, being intended to show, beyond all doubt, the eternity of the word. There is also to be observed a particular relation between the nature and glory of the

word, as thus described, and its operations now immediately spoken of. In the first place, "all things were made by him." This is said without exception or limitation, and hence in whatever respect God speaks to us by creation, it is his only begotten Son whom we hear. In the next place, life and light, the two most immediate communications of Divine goodness, have their fountain for us in him : and as they speak to us in our innermost consciousness, we hear him, as the word of God, proclaiming through the heights and depths, the whole compass of our being, the mysteries of an infinite love. The shining of the light in darkness which comprehends it not, is the insensibility of the world to the manifestation of God's attributes, which it is the equally glorious and beneficent object of his word to make known. Wherever that word speaks or acts, there shines the light, which being unperceived, leaves the world in darkness.

VERSES 6—9.

It was not necessary that St. John should give, after the above clear statement of our Lord's divinity, any account of his miraculous conception. But it was of great importance that he should shew how his Divine nature, having become incarnate, lost none of its dignity thereby, but was still the true light, and possessed of all the power and authority proper to the Creator. Such had been the reverence entertained for John the Baptist, that the clear apprehension of Christ's divinity was essential to a right understanding of their separate offices. John moved the spirits of men as they had never been stirred before by human voice; and the circumstances attending his birth threw the grandeur of a solemn mystery about his person. Hence there was a notion from the very first, that he might be the long expected Messiah; and though this error was soon dissipated, yet even at the period when this Gospel was written, the wisdom, power, and

holiness of Jesus, could only be understood as having a character distinct from that of his forerunner, by an appeal to his essential character as the original life and light of men. John came as a witness to the truth of Jesus; and it is in this fact, that we learn the real sublimity, both of his office, and personal qualities. As he was sent, that men, through his testimony, might be taught to believe in Jesus, he must necessarily have possessed endowments, both mental and moral, immeasurably superior to the ordinary standard of human virtues: otherwise, his witness to the claims of Jesus could not have been of such worth, that even the most prejudiced hesitated to reject it.

VERSES 10—14.

The presence of an unrecognised God has ever been^{*} the most awful characteristic of a fallen world. God is, at all times, necessarily present to his creatures, and they could not fail to discern his nearness to them, but for their hardness of heart, and grossness of apprehension. Their sin, in this respect, is greater or less, according to the mode in which He is pleased to indicate his presence. It may be only in the ordinary influence of his power: it may be by singular proofs of his providence: it may be by special appeals to the conscience; or by new light diffused upon the mind. But when God was in Christ, his presence was of such a kind, that for the world not to recognise and confess it, was the strongest proof ever given of moral lifelessness. The words, the miracles, the ever-diffusive power of Jesus, were all so many distinct indications of present Deity. One degree of greater blindness there was, and that appeared in the case of the people among whom he especially sojourned. There were signs about him, amply sufficient to convince the world that its Maker was now its inhabitant; but there were distinct and most particular marks, by which the Jewish nation might have learnt

that their own gracious Lord was among them in the person of Jesus. Their guilt, therefore, was far greater than that of the Gentiles, or the world at large. But the apostacy was not universal. A few among the myriads who wilfully blinded themselves to the light which shone in the face of Jesus Christ, were converted, and gladly owned him as a Saviour, and to them he eventually gave such helps and blessings that they were fitted to take their place in the family of God, and received an acknowledged right to call him their Father in Heaven. The power here spoken of is not to be confounded with strength or ability : it here means right, or authority ; but this right is, itself, immediately derived from a spiritual condition, for it is expressly stated, that those who received this authority to call themselves sons of God, were absolutely born of God ; and that it was by the faculties of the new nature thus acquired, that they could behold the glory of the Word made flesh.

VERSES 15—18.

The fact, that John bore witness to our Lord, is stated above ; but here we are told in what way he bore witness to him, and what was the substance of his testimony. Thus, the superior dignity of Jesus is shewn to rest on his priority of existence, that is, on his Divine pre-existence, it being well known that, as to birth, John was the elder. Again, as in Him was the fountain of life and light, so to Him have believers been indebted, from the very first, for their renewed nature, with all its spiritual properties ; and for those successive supplies of strength, those several helps and gifts, grace following grace, which satisfy them, that it is the fulness of the Godhead which now supplies their wants. Another assertion of Christ's dignity is found in the contrast drawn between him and Moses. The latter was charged with the publication of the law ; a grand and sublime office, but chiefly

serving to convict men of sin, and revealing only a very small portion of God's dispensations. The law may be contrasted with grace and truth, first, because it involves no mercy, no gift or blessing, but what belongs to the strictest justice: it emanates from the purest holiness; it has, in itself, no pitiful regard for those who are marked by imperfections, or tainted with sin. Secondly: it is not given as a revelation of what is true, but as a proclamation of the right. It proceeds, indeed, from him who is the very truth, and is, itself, truth as the image of his moral will; but mankind are not taught it because it is true, but because it is what the Supreme Ruler commands. Grace and truth, on the other hand, offer peace, and the full light of Divine wisdom, to fallen man; and they come by Jesus Christ, and by him alone. The next point in the testimony of John is the highest of all. He proclaims the indwelling of Jesus in the bosom of the Father, and the living power of Jesus to reveal Him as he was never before revealed. Such is the substance of the witness which John bore to his Divine Master. It is a noble summary of his preaching, as it referred to the character and office of Jesus; and shews to what a large extent his hearers were instructed in the first elements of the Gospel.

VERSES 19—28.

It is plainly the object of the Evangelist to report in what various ways John the Baptist bore witness of Christ. When his fame was at its height, he found the most fitting opportunity of declaring the entire subordination of his ministry to the purposes of the Messiah. So imperfectly was the character of the expected deliverer understood, that those among the Jews, who suspected that John might, himself, be the Messiah, erred much less grossly than many of their countrymen on this important subject. John was invested with a moral grandeur which properly inspired awe and admiration;

which felt its value. It drew them towards him with an irresistible impulse. A thirst was awakened in their souls, only to be quenched by the fountains of his grace and wisdom. They followed him because they desired to enjoy his discourse, not in brief and accidental communications ; but in the long and happy intercourse of discipleship. Jesus benignly met their wish. He permitted them to accompany him to his obscure home ; and allowed them to remain with him from about four in the afternoon to the close of day. Andrew was peculiarly affected by his conduct and discourse. He was evidently one of the few who had been desiring, with a right and humble spirit, the coming of the Messiah. No feeling of disappointment attended his discovery that the grandeur of Christ was to be veiled by meekness, poverty, and patience. His immediate wish was to make his brother a sharer in the blessings which he felt must belong to the followers of such a master. Simon was not an unwilling hearer of the tidings. Jesus beheld him with that all-penetrating glance which left nothing hidden in his history. As the son of Jona, he was bold, ardent, but vacillating : as the disciple of Jesus, he was ultimately to become firm as a rock, against which the gates of hell, no storms of persecution, neither force nor flattery, should ever prevail.

VERSES 43—51.

Jesus had fulfilled the object of his journey to Bethany, or Bethabara, in Judæa ; and was now preparing, after two or three months' absence, to return into Galilee. Philip, as well as Andrew and Peter, was a native of that district, and they were all three inhabitants of the same town, Bethsaida, situated somewhere on the western side of the sea or lake of Tiberias. Not only did Philip readily obey the call to accompany Jesus, but, like Andrew, he was anxious to communicate his happiness to others. Nathaniel was evidently a dear and

venerated friend. We may learn somewhat of his character by the very mode in which Philip addressed him. He would not have spoken to him of Moses, of both the law and the prophets, had he not been known as a faithful enquirer after truth. But there was a startling addition to the mention of Moses and the prophets. Jesus, of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, was not a title which harmonized at once with the imaginary glories of a traditional Messiah. The very name of Nazareth, the poorest, the most despised of Jewish towns, was sufficient to excite a host of prejudices. But the "Come and see," was an appeal which the honest and candid-minded Nathaniel could not resist. The brief discourse between him and Jesus, satisfied him that he had done well in yielding to Philip's call. What it was that occupied his mind when praying or meditating under the fig tree, we are not told: but no miracle could ever so completely convince us of a person's possessing Divine power, as his proving that he knew perfectly every thought passing through our minds: every wish or movement of affection, influencing our hearts. This was the evidence of his Divinity which Jesus afforded Nathaniel, and it was enough. But more was promised. The proof now vouchsafed was personal: internal: mental. By and bye there was to be the outward and visible. Nathaniel was, probably, an eye-witness of some of the manifestations of God's paternal love when he sent his angels to minister unto Jesus: or our Lord may have referred to the period when, having entered into his glory, all the hosts of heaven should unreservedly attend upon his steps. Nathaniel is supposed to be identical with the Apostle Bartholomew.

CHAPTER II.

VERSES 1—11.

Cana was a village some few miles distant from Nazareth. It is said to have been the residence of Nathaniel. This may account for the invitation given to Jesus; unless, as it would appear from the first mention of his mother, that she was mainly instrumental in bringing him to the feast. "They have no wine," was the natural expression of a gentle, benevolent mind, awake to all the necessities of friendship. Her sudden perception of the want, and her eager, supplicatory reference to her son, throws more light upon Mary's womanly beauty than the noblest picture ever painted. The answer of Jesus was not so abrupt as it sounds; but the appeal made to him involved a call upon his miraculous powers, for the exercise of which neither the time nor the scene, strictly considered, was fitting. Hence the slight rebuke, and the important lesson, that the exercise of Divine attributes ought not to be looked for, except in accordance with Divine dispensations, and certainly not in obedience to human wishes and caprice. But the action of Jesus on this occasion, shews us, that such are the tenderness and love which characterize his disposition, that there are times and circumstances in which he will yield to the desires of those who seek his aid; and that a miracle will be wrought, though out of season, to satisfy their wants. Many are the answers to prayer which partake of this nature. This may certainly encourage us never to despair of extraordinary help; but it is no encouragement to presumption, or a superstitious looking for miracles. Jesus may, or may not, employ his power on our behalf. We must leave it to him to give or not to give the wine. But there is a deep significance in the change of the tasteless water into the cheering beverage. It indicates the power of Christ to

convert the simplest support of nature, or the most ordinary occurrences of life, into means of rich enjoyment. Let him speak the word, and the coldest, the most weary and listless heart will feel its thoughts animated with a new life; sparkling with unexpected lustre: let him so order it, and the plain, unadorned path of a toilsome, common-place, uninteresting life, will be strewed with flowers, and open upon prospects of the most exciting beauty. The effect of this miracle, upon the minds of his followers, was striking and profound. It gave an intenser character to their belief. They saw with greater distinctness those features of divinity which entitled Jesus, not only to veneration, but to the highest species of homage and devotion. The beginning of miracles was the real beginning of their life as disciples.

VERSES 12—17.

Capernaum was a populous and important town; inviting, by its situation on the sea of Galilee, a concourse of the busiest and most intelligent men of the country. Jesus subsequently made it his chief place of abode. His present visit was only of sufficient length to awaken the minds of the people to the Gospel which he intended, before long, to preach so fully among them. The Evangelist having thus briefly mentioned his visit to Capernaum, notes his first journey to celebrate the Passover at Jerusalem, and thus gives us one of the four dates by which the length of our Lord's ministry is usually determined. It appears to have been chiefly for the purpose of shewing with what a clear and unmodified assumption of authority he commenced his course, that this passage was written. The honour of his Father, and the rightful sanctity of his house, were the first objects of his regard: but it was not merely as a servant, but as a son that he undertook to punish those who offended against either God or the Temple. It was in obedience to the holy zeal, which, like a fire, con-

sumed him, that the Psalmist of old dared the resentment of a rebellious people. The disciples of Jesus afterwards remembered how much more forcibly the words, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up," applied to Jesus than to David.

VERSES 18—22.

The Jews had no right to demand of Jesus any particular proof of his authority to expel the money-changers from the Temple. Any Israelite would have been justified in correcting the abuses which had degraded the house of God into a mart. Those who carried on any traffic in its sacred precincts, were gross violators of the law; and were proper objects of the scourging, which any one who had zeal and courage for the purpose, might choose to inflict. The answer, therefore, which our Lord returned, was strictly suited to the occasion. He refused to own their right to question him why he did that which every true Israelite ought to do; but, at the same time, he asserted his authority in a manner as startling as it was lofty, and productive, eventually, of the happiest and most soothing effects upon the minds of his disciples.

VERSES 23—25.

Nothing to a modern reader appears more surprising than the fact, that Jesus wrought so many miracles, and yet was rejected. Care, however, should be taken, to observe how this really took place. First, let it be remembered, that the reality of the miracles was not disputed. His enemies, as well as his friends, owned that he cast out devils, and did many other wonderful things. They sheltered themselves against the obvious consequence of such an acknowledgment by ascribing the power which he possessed to an evil, rather than a Divine source. Next, it should be observed, that while

even the most virulent of our Lord's opponents could not shut their eyes to his miracles, there were vast numbers, as we learn from the present passage, upon whom his works exercised an immediate and powerful, but only transient influence. They confessed the reality of his miracles, and believed in his name. Their testimony is of vast importance to us historically. That they were not trustworthy, as disciples, only illustrates the common weakness of the human heart. The conviction that a thing is true, is not, of itself, sufficient to determine our conduct. There is a common-sense conviction in the minds of most men, that a certain course of action will lead to good or ill, and this conviction often becomes far stronger than that produced by miracles, because it is in the man's own consciousness: and yet there are innumerable instances in which it has no effect upon the conduct, and by degrees ceases to be felt as true. So with our Lord's miracles. Many followed him when they saw what he did. But they were not truly converted. This he well knew. In a short time some of them were numbered among his enemies, and their minds became darkened, even as to the evidence which had produced, at first, so powerful an effect upon them. We further learn from this passage, how cautiously our Lord laid the foundations of his church.

C H A P T E R I I I .

VERSES 1—8.

A man will risk his safety or interests for religion only in proportion to the strength of his faith in its truth and worth. Nicodemus believed that Jesus was a teacher sent from God, and that God was with him. This was sufficient to awaken in his mind an earnest wish to know more of his doctrine. He was ready to humble himself, and run some danger to satisfy his wish; but his idea of the value of what Jesus

could teach him, was not yet distinct enough to render it superior to all other considerations. The salutation with which he addressed our Lord was becoming and reverential; but it was met by an answer which at once proved to him that far more was needed to render him acceptable to Jesus, than the acknowledgment that he was a teacher sent from God. This much he could readily comprehend; but the actual meaning of the phrases employed by our Lord appeared dark and vague. Of the kingdom of Heaven he might form some dim notion. He could, in some measure, understand that it was to consist in God's recovered dominion over the hearts of repentant sinners; but of the new birth he could form no idea. The question which he asked meant nothing: he merely put it to gain time. His mind was in utter confusion. Our Lord saw his perplexity; and the answer which he gave was so full and clear, that Nicodemus truly deserved the rebuke which he received, for not, at once, entering into its meaning. To be born again might have been taken as a figurative expression; and as such might have meant any change which the speaker employed it to designate. Supposing it to have been figurative, the imagination of the hearer, once excited, might have taken so wide a range, that the figure would have lost all proper meaning to his understanding. But our Lord plainly shewed that his expression was not figurative: that it had one meaning, and pointed to one distinct and intelligible object. Nicodemus sinned in not seeing this: and especially does every disciple of Christ, in these later days, sin, when he asks doubtfully, "How can these things be?" Surely, to enter the kingdom of Heaven is not a figure, a dream, or vision. Here, there is a reality, a substantial good, without which, as a positive attainment, the whole of the Gospel would be little better than a fable. Again, "to be born of the flesh," is a reality, as no one will dispute: but our Lord sets, as

exactly parallel with this reality of the birth in the flesh, the birth in the Spirit; and, to go a step farther, as that which is flesh is of flesh, so that which is Spirit is of Spirit. All are realities with which we have here to do. There could be no place for the contrast, were not the birth of the Spirit within us, as actual and real as the birth of the body which is without. But there are two additional circumstances brought into consideration by our Lord's statement to Nicodemus. It is not of the birth of the Spirit, simply, that he speaks; but of a second birth, in respect to the Spirit: and being born of water is spoken of simultaneously with this regeneration of the Spirit. Now, to be born again of the Spirit, might be equivalent to the creation of a new living power within us, not existing there before. But Scripture does not represent man, even in his worst condition, as wanting in any essential quality of nature to be added afterwards. The noblest powers of his being still exist, though prostrate, dormant, and wholly inactive, under the power of sin. The act of creation constituted the soul what it is in its elemental nature. But it is dead in its corruption and trespasses. God's spirit finds it in this state; breathes upon it; pours into it a new life; and as it re-awakens under the power of this parent Spirit, it is conscious of a new birth; of regeneration from Heaven. It was once created: it was once born, the date of that first birth being the instant of its union with the sensitive animal frame: as it is Spirit, so it was born of the Spirit at the beginning; and now, in recovering from the death-blow of sin, it is again born of the Spirit, the Spirit alone having the power and the means to replenish it with life. But water is mentioned by our Lord in connection with the Spirit. It ought, however, to be very carefully observed, that to be born of the Spirit is spoken of as something distinct; but not so with regard to the water: to be born of water, is only as an adjunct of being born of the Spirit. If

it were said in one place, " Except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God," and then in another place, " Except a man be born of water, he cannot enter the kingdom of God," the latter would have a very different species of independent efficacy assigned it, to that tributary place appointed it as a means of grace. Our Lord is speaking of realities, and, therefore, though the birth by water be wholly subordinate to the birth of the Spirit, it is a real birth, after its kind, and cannot be dispensed with, except at the peril of our calling that dispensable which Christ tells us is indispensable. Nor is it difficult to discover why he attached such importance to the water. The material and visible baptism was the method of entering into covenant with him, as far as it could be recognised, or understood by the world. He who was but a citizen of the world, or, at best, a member of the Jewish commonwealth by natural birth, became, by this water birth, a member of the new community owning Christ for its head. As to this, its social effect, in regard to the church, he who was baptized was born into the congregation of Christ's people. This is, at all times, the case; but the address to Nicodemus derived additional force from the circumstances of the times. He who shrank from baptism, proved that he was afraid of owning himself a follower of Christ; and, in such a case, it is obvious, there being a want of faith, there being a virtual repudiation of the Gospel, the man who was not born again of water, could not be born again of the Spirit. It is not, by any means, to be concluded from this, that the birth of the Spirit can never be enjoyed but on condition of the visible baptism. All that we are taught by the case of Nicodemus is, that where baptism may be had, and is either neglected or refused, the regeneration of the Spirit is not to be expected. A consideration of much greater difficulty has been connected with this subject. The doctrine of baptismal regeneration is com-

monly made to rest almost entirely upon the words here spoken by our Lord. But whatever the force of that doctrine, as proved or illustrated by other evidence, it seems perilous to conclude that, because a wicked rejection of Christ, or a refusal to confess him, by the outward badge of his society, leaves a man still unborn of the Spirit, an acceptance of the badge must necessarily be attended with the inward regeneration. Is it to be supposed, that if Nicodemus had offered to be baptized secretly and by night, the new birth of his soul would have followed that stealthy acceptance of Christ? Is it not obvious, that the main value of baptism depended upon its publicity; and that a man who would not confess the Lord, could not expect to derive any blessing from his baptism? But if the efficacy of baptism was ever conditional, it must always be conditional. The conditions upon which it depends being determined by the nature of each separate case; childhood and old age; and all the several circumstances of life, modifying the nature of the acknowledgment which Christ expects from those who come to be baptized into his church. The grace which he gives us, is, at all times, free grace. It may certainly be looked for where the method of seeking it, which he, himself, has indicated, is adopted. It is often given where least expected; but nothing can be more dangerous than to set up a demand for the highest gifts of the Spirit, on the credit of a mechanical formalism. The strongest caution that can ever be given on this subject, is to be found, if properly considered, in our Lord's own words, "Thou hearest the sound thereof." We cannot, he tells us, understand whence the Spirit comes, or whither it goes, but we can feel its presence: we are sensible of its power and operations, just in the same way as we hear and feel the wind, and therefore know it to be a reality, though we cannot determine its movements. Thus, nothing can be clearer than the fact, that he, who is born of the Spirit, must know it by his inward consciousness:

that he, who is the subject of its gracious visitations, must be just as sure of it as he who feels his physical frame animated and refreshed by the blessed winds of heaven. As this is our Lord's own rule for testing the doctrine of regeneration, it may surely be adopted with great safety and propriety.

VERSES 9—13.

Nicodemus felt the mighty importance of the doctrine thus taught him, but could not properly comprehend it. As a master of Israel, he ought not to have been ignorant that a change of heart, a change of the inward man, is necessary to acceptance with God. Had he read the Scriptures, such as he had them, in a right spirit, he could not have failed to learn this. Christ, as the Word of God; the Holy Spirit, speaking by the prophets; every saint of old, had testified to the necessity and the truth of spiritual regeneration. In their several offices and degrees, they had, in this respect, spoken of what they knew; of what they had seen. The state of the world, and of Israel, in particular, shewed how their witness had been rejected. When our Lord spoke of the doctrine on which he was thus discoursing, as belonging to earthly things, he meant that it pertained to the condition of his people while still on earth. It had not the grandeur of the revelations which he might have made respecting his own future glory; and the magnificent perfections and rewards, of which his followers are to be the inheritors in heaven. Unhappily for Nicodemus, enquirer though he was, he was unprepared for the wisdom of which he might otherwise have been made partaker. The elementary truth of the Gospel not being received, or understood, it is a vain presumption for the supposed Christian to look for the sublimer revelations of his creed. One passing illustration of what he meant was given by our Lord. He alluded to his own divinity: to his equal presence in heaven and on earth. Little could Nicodemus understand

this, while he stumbled at the doctrine which represented the Holy Spirit as having a converting and regenerating power over the human soul.

VERSES 14—21.

The frequent instances in which our Lord connects the most striking statements respecting his future sufferings, with some mention of his Divinity, afford an interesting subject for observation. Even from the first, it was necessary that the belief which his followers had in him, as the Messiah and the Son of God, should be tempered by the expectation of his sufferings. No less necessary has it been, in all ages, that the contemplation of his character as Redeemer, should be mixed with that of his Deity. The lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness, must have been very familiar to the mind of a Jew, seeking mercy of God. It evidently meant more than what was related of its immediate efficacy. The comparison which our Lord made between himself and that serpent, must have startled Nicodemus; and the beneficial impression which it left upon his mind may have given occasion to the peculiar tenderness with which our Lord immediately proceeded to assure him, that God sent his son into the world not to condemn it, not, that is, to become an instrument of vengeance, as the fiery serpents were, but to be like the serpent lifted up; not to be as the serpents of the earth, inhabiting the fiery dust of the wilderness, but as the serpent exalted above the earth, and by the contemplation of which the venom of the reptile was rendered harmless. The especial statement, that faith was the necessary condition on which the application of all these blessings depended, renders this first part of the chapter a complete summary of Evangelical theology.

VERSES 22—24.

The labours of John were so strictly introductory to those of Christ, and the Gospel, that we may readily understand why the two thus drew near to each other before the close of the Baptist's ministry. Many there were who entered very imperfectly into the meaning of the preliminary teaching, and who accordingly felt, as disciples of John, rivals of the disciples of Christ. But this was not the proper result of the dispensation of repentance ; and a large number of the most faithful and intelligent of our Lord's followers seem to have been prepared for his doctrines by the cry of his messenger. *Aenon* and *Salim* were names familiar in ancient times, but are now only known by tradition. Ancient cities commonly leave some relics ; but the fords of a river are almost as variable as the sandy mounds of a desert.

VERSES 25—36.

The Jewish notions of purification were naturally connected with baptism ; and when the disciples of John were questioned on the subject, they could hardly fail to perceive, that it involved many points for consideration hitherto unnoticed. The fact that there was another baptism ; and that it was beginning to be sought for with greater eagerness than that of their master, excited a still deeper interest in the enquiry. John answered them by simply referring to the higher nature, and therefore greater power, of Christ. The superior efficacy of his baptism was to be discovered in this, that he had himself received the Spirit of God without measure, and could, therefore, while speaking the words of God, diffuse that living grace to whom he would. It may seem strange, that, after the assertion, “all men come to him,” John should say, “and no man receiveth his testimony ;” but it was at first as it has been since ; thousands rush to the baptism of Christ,

while few accept his doctrine, or are ready to bear his cross. The concluding witness of John to the divinity of his Master, and the solemn warning on the subject of faith in him, might well be regarded as a noble close to his ministry as a teacher.

C H A P T E R I V.

VERSES 1—9.

Jesus desired to prevent any untimely excitement respecting himself, or his doctrine. It was necessary that he should establish the perfect independence of his disciples; and that he should early familiarise their minds to the distinction between the baptism with which they were to baptize men in his name, and that of John. But this done, he was prepared to resume his ministry in Galilee, the nursery, as it were, of his infant community. Samaria lay directly on his road; and the ancient town of Sychar, with its neighbouring well, had, doubtless, associations for him, which rendered his rest there, at the sixth hour, (that is, the hour of noon,) pleasant and affecting. In his human origin, he had the right of an inheritor to the well by which he sat; and when he asked water of the woman, it was like asking tribute of the stranger. The poor Samaritan knew not this; but it was sufficiently surprising for her to find a venerable looking Jew requesting aught at her hands. Such was the hatred existing between the two people, that each denied the other the commonest office of humanity.

VERSES 10—15.

It may be questioned whether our Lord might not already discern the working of some gracious influence in the heart of the Samaritan woman which, had she known him, would have, at once, made her his petitioner. Otherwise, we may take it as a general truth, that when “the gift of God” is

understood, and Jesus is recognised as its sole dispenser, sufficient motives exist to make us seek his aid. "The gift of God" is a very comprehensive expression. It represents the whole body of his graces and mercies; sometimes bestowed distributively and successively; but sometimes concentrated in one single, saving, life-giving blessing. The gift of God to the Samaritan woman was the knowledge of salvation, with the means of its attainment, the water of life, the regenerating grace of the Divine Spirit. Far, indeed, were the woman's thoughts from the comprehension of this heavenly mystery. Her feelings were reverential; but they could ascend no higher than the objects of tradition. "Art thou greater than our father Jacob?" Jesus by his subsequent reply awakened in her mind some sense of a mystery. "Give me this water, that I thirst not," was the expression of incipient faith; but it was as immediately lost in the returning care about present objects. "That I come not hither to draw," that I may escape my toilsome labour, was the engrossing wish of her heart. And thus it generally is with the feelings created by some dim apprehension of spiritual truth. They excite a momentary desire of undefined good; but unless it be followed up by clearer intimations, and actual gifts of grace, the sentiment passes away, and is never, perhaps, recovered.

VERSES 16—26.

Happily for the woman, our Lord did not leave her with a mind thus awakened, but untaught. A simple proof of his knowledge convinced her that he was a prophet. This prepared her for the patient reception of two important truths, which otherwise she might have been very unwilling to confess. In referring to the fathers, she meant it to be understood, that her ancient, patriarchal faith had an authority which ought not to be regarded as subject to the Jewish

ritual, or Jewish government. She forgot the Divine origin of the law, and the mixtures and corruptions which had rendered the Samaritans, since the captivity of the ten tribes, a justly suspected race. "Ye worship ye know not what," was the unpalatable answer which our Lord gave to her pretensions. But then he taught her a far sublimer truth. The rivalry of temples was soon to cease. God was about to be known among mankind in his pure and glorious nature: not as the God of the Jews, or Samaritans, or of this or that nation, but as the Father of all, and as a Spirit, who cares for no other worship but that which is rendered in spirit and in truth. The woman's soul bowed beneath the grandeur of this teaching. She felt herself in the presence of one greater than a prophet. Her confession of an expected Messiah shewed the working of her mind. Her awakening hope was fulfilled: and "I am He" completed the most remarkable of all the dialogues reported in the New Testament.

VERSES 27—30.

There was surprise on both sides when the disciples came up. They were still full of Jewish prejudices; and though they dare not ask our Lord why he talked with the Samaritan woman, they but ill suppressed their wonder at his supposed sacrifice of dignity. The woman was no less astonished on her part. She had not expected to see the obscure stranger so suddenly surrounded by twelve followers, all men of earnest look, and some of them of the most majestic cast of Jewish form. There was enough in the whole occurrence to make her forgetful of everything else. She left her water-pot, and hastened to tell what she had so wonderfully learnt. It is worth observing that Christ generally taught those first, who seemed most likely to teach others. Earnestness excites earnestness. The looks and words of the woman were marked by this great sign of truth. She had herself seen Christ; and, at her call, the men of the city went to see him.

VERSES 31—38.

The disciples were actuated by the most faithful love for their Master. As far as they could understand his wants, they were anxious to supply them. Their zeal on this occasion was met by a befitting return. He gave them a clearer insight into his purposes, and into their own office, as the successors of the Prophets, and of John the Baptist, the men who had laboured before them, and of whose preparatory exertions the preachers of the Gospel were to reap the fruits.

VERSES 39—42.

It is interesting to observe on what different degrees of evidence the belief of different men is founded. Some of the Samaritans were fully satisfied, from what the woman stated, that she had indeed found the Messiah. They did not err in their ready faith. The others did not believe till they had enjoyed a much stronger species of proof. They did not err in their prudence. It is sloth, carelessness, an ill-concealed indifference, or voluntary ignorance only, which debases a quick belief: and pride, or immoral reluctance only, which renders doubt a sin.

VERSES 43—54.

The two days which Jesus spent among the Samaritans were precious to them, and of vast importance to his future church. Circumstanced as the Samaritans were, it might have given rise to irreconcilable disputes among the different members of the Christian community in Palestine, had any one part of it been wholly left without the personal ministry of the Saviour. It sounds strange that our Lord should have gone into Galilee for the reason here assigned. Strictly considered, Judæa was his own country; born as he was in Bethlehem of Juda, and being of the house and lineage of

David. But he had been brought up in Galilee; the cities and villages of Galilee were his chief resort; and Capernaum is especially designated as his own city. But that, in the present case, Judæa must be meant, appears evident from the statement, that the Galileans received him, that is, received him with favour, having, it seems, been strongly affected by what they had seen him do at Jerusalem. The Evangelist, therefore, probably intended to signify, that being in Samaria, midway between Judæa and Galilee, instead of returning to the former, strictly his own country, he proceeded to the latter, a far humbler, but much more fruitful scene of labour. Never had his appearance there been more acceptable to the afflicted. The nobleman saw in him a deliverer from the most urgent sorrow. His faith was answered. But every such miracle had a double object. While it removed the distress of an individual believer, it taught others to believe, who, otherwise, would never have become believers. It was to these latter, and not to the nobleman himself, to whom our Lord referred.

CHAPTER V.

VERSES 1—9.

Jesus went up to Jerusalem whenever the public worship of God especially required it: this was his first rule. His second was: whenever he could find the greatest opportunity of doing good, then also he went up to Jerusalem. The two occasions were generally united; but we are not told which of the feasts of the Jews this was, which now induced him to leave Galilee; and it is probable, therefore, that the feast was not one of those which legally demanded his presence, but one which he kept, because of the opportunity which it afforded him of exercising his mercy. As he was led by common considerations of charity to Jerusalem, so the same induced him to seek that part of the city which was most

crowded by the unfortunate. The Pool of Bethesda is equally unknown to tradition, and to history. But this ought not to create surprise. Localities have been marked by special interferences of Divine mercy for a time. The grace which rendered them temporarily remarkable being withdrawn, they have become as obscure as before. And thus it was with the Pool of Bethesda. But there is no proper reason for questioning either the cures wrought by its waters, or the means by which they were effected. If angels exist at all, they exist in myriads; and why should we doubt their beneficence? Why should we disbelieve the agency of one, out of unnumbered millions, employed in aiding the cure of human infirmity. Were we asked to choose between two sides: the one believing that good beings do good to man; the other believing that they are utterly unconcerned about him, which party should we espouse? But it ought to be carefully observed, in the present instance, that the Evangelist speaks of the angel historically, and that he only speaks of him as explaining popularly the curative influence of the water. The actual means of cure had no relation to the truth of the Gospel. Jesus went down to the pool because he was there to find proper objects of his compassion. Among the crowd of selfish, superstitious, and vagrant idlers, were some real sufferers, and passing by the mere spectators of the scene, he beheld one, whose simplicity and actual distress, at once recommended him to his sympathy. Brief sickness may make a man an enthusiast: a dreamer: but it is a rare thing to find a sickness of thirty-eight years, or any long period of infirmity, leaving the sufferer vain and thoughtless. The particulars here recorded afford a striking illustration of the uncertainty, of the vague hope attending other means of cure, even though supernatural, compared with the immediate power of Christ's word, and, therefore, with that of his blessing, whether pronounced audibly or not. To the question, "Wilt

thou be made whole?" the sufferer gave no direct answer. He only spoke of his unfriended, helpless state. That complete prostration of soul, that surrender of all the pride of hope in earthly means of cure, rendered him a fitting object of Divine mercy: and the poor cripple, who had watched for so many years in vain the moving of the waters of Bethesda; who had so often stretched out his hands, and directed his imploring looks to the surrounding crowd, unnoticed, now found his infirmities removed, in an instant, by the single word of Jesus. That he carried his bed on the Sabbath was but a traditional offence. At the moment, he had probably no recollection of any rule on the subject: but even if he had, as no law was violated, the word of Jesus must have been to him of far greater authority than that of Rabbis, or tradition.

VERSES 10—16.

The unlooked for feeling of health and vigour, so occupied the thoughts of the recovered cripple, that he had wholly lost sight of his benefactor. But it would seem that he had not forgotten his duty to God, for he had lost no time in hastening to the Temple. Nothing could have been more trifling than the accusation brought against him of breaking the Sabbath. He carried his bed as a matter of necessity. Jesus only told him to do so that he might at once discover the certainty of his restoration to strength. From our Lord's words, "Sin no more," it is evident, that his sickness was the punishment of guilt. In most cases suffering is the consequence of sin: not in all, because in many it may be intended as discipline, a severe, but still a lesson, and not a punishment. Such, however, is our condition, that the latter is far more frequently than the former, the object of affliction; and when a man is recovering from his sickness, to whatever immediate cause he may attribute his cure, the highest of all prudential considerations, is involved in our Lord's counsel, "Sin no more,

lest a worse thing come unto thee." The Jews persecuted Jesus the more because of the miracle which he had thus wrought. But the motives by which they were influenced were, probably, of a mixed kind. Some regarded him with fresh dislike, because they ignorantly supposed that he had really broken the Sabbath: others, because, pretending only zeal for God's ordinance, they saw how greatly his authority must increase against their Rabbinical superstitions, if he continued to exercise a power like that which he had just displayed.

VERSES 17—23.

Our Lord could give no stronger answer to the accusation of the Jews, that he had broken the Sabbath, than that by which he shewed his own work to be the very work of God, by whom the Sabbath was constituted. But important as was the question of Sabbatical observances, another of far greater consequence was now started. "My Father," was the title by which Jesus had spoken of God. As a supposed violator of the Sabbath, he was made the object of a fierce and fanatical persecution: but now that he openly assumed a Divine authority and character, the rage of his enemies became more intense, and the wish to silence him, was changed into the desire to put him to death. Against their wrath and clamour, he calmly advanced his full right to the dignity which he had assumed. Whatever wisdom, whatever power, he enjoyed, he had it from his Father, who freely shared with him his boundless might, and unlimited control over all the issues, the means, and modes of life. As the Eternal Word, he had been with the Father from the beginning. But he now stood before the world in his human form and nature; and it was of himself, in this his incarnation, that he now spoke to his persecutors. God was still to shew him, in this his human character, greater wonders than had yet

been displayed on his behalf: and, hereafter, would constitute him, as the Son of Man, judge of the assembled universe. The contemplation of the Son thus enjoying, in his twofold nature, the glory of the Father, affords an all-sufficient argument to the believer, to honour him as the Father.

VERSES 24—31.

It might be supposed that he, who hears the word of Christ, must necessarily believe in the Father who sent him. But it is not so. As many false teachers have come in their own name, and been credited without any proper reference to God, so there are those who give a spurious honour to Christ, accepting his teaching, and admiring his character, but not in immediate connection with the system of salvation, originating in the decree of his Almighty Father. This is to hear his word without believing in Him that sent him. But where the two are united, there is life everlasting: a security against condemnation; and that transition from death to life, which implies not a future, but an immediate enjoyment of all the proper powers of the living soul. It is not said, "Shall pass," but "is passed from death unto life." This is further shewn by the wonderful statement, that not only was the hour coming, but was even then, when the dead would hear, and live again at the voice of the Son of God. The daughter of Jairus, the widow's son at Nain, and Lazarus, each illustrating death at a particular stage, heard that voice, and lived. But it does not seem to have been of the grosser, bodily death, that our Lord intended his words to be mainly understood. As the death of the soul, of the inner man, was the first, and most terrible consequence of sin, that of the body following long after, so the first effect of salvation is the return of the inner man to life, the resurrection of the body being deferred to the period when God shall have prepared another outward creation and economy to receive it. This final result of

redemption is connected by our Lord with the further assertion of his appointment to the office of Judge of quick and dead, "because he is the Son of Man;" that is, because his human nature, and what he had both done and suffered in the character of man, eminently qualified him for pronouncing an unquestionably just decision on the merits of human action. But even in this, he repudiated the notion that he was claiming a right, independent of Him that sent him. It was His will which he came to execute; and had not witness been borne to him by his Father, his own words would have availed nothing.

VERSES 32—38.

The witness of John was in no wise needed by Jesus himself, but it was of the greatest value to others. Had the light which John diffused been steadily followed, and not forgotten, as if but a passing meteor, the testimony which he bore to Jesus, might have wrought a national repentance. That our Lord did not depend either on him, or on any other human witness, he proved in the most striking manner by the miracles which he performed. There was, indeed, the higher witness of the Father; but glorious as that witness was for himself, it was rendered ineffective to others by the hardness of their hearts, and consequent grossness of apprehension. Thus, they could neither hear his voice, nor see his shape; and now they rejected even his word, despising the message brought them by his only begotten Son.

VERSES 39—47.

The mingled reproof and exhortation in this passage, indicate how anxiously our Lord still yearned for the salvation of his people. What can be more pathetic than the remonstrance, "Ye will not come to me?" or, what more forcible in the way of argument, than the direct reference to Scripture, on the

one hand, and, on the other, to the inconsistency of which men are guilty when they so readily accept a mere human pretender, but obstinately reject a teacher and a Saviour sent from Heaven? The main root of this folly, is a false estimate of human wisdom, of worldly possessions and dignities, the pure honour of a soul restored to its proper life, and received into communion with God, being a thing utterly lost sight of in the turmoil and ambitious strife of earthly existence. In rejecting Jesus, the Jews sinned against the vast circle of evidence contained in their law, and the entire structure of their religion. It needed not, therefore, the personal accusation of Jesus to condemn them. The witness whom, if they thought aright, they would most dread to meet at the last, is their own leader, Moses. By rejecting the Saviour, they renounce the Law-giver.

CHAPTER VI.

VERSES 1—14.

Some slight differences exist between St. John's account of the preliminaries to this great miracle, and that of the other Evangelists. The account of the miracle itself is substantially the same in all; and, as in other cases, while the variation in subordinate points shews the independence of the witnesses, the want of agreement may be traced to the multifarious nature of the minute circumstances attending such events. Thus our Lord may really have, on the one side, first made enquiry of the disciples as to feeding the people: and some one or other of the disciples, not hearing that enquiry, may, on the other hand, have made it of him. St. John gives the former, the other Evangelists the latter incident. The command given by our Lord to gather up the fragments, is full of instruction. First, it is a warning against the wasteful, or presumptuous use of Divine blessings. Jesus wrought a

miracle to feed his necessitous hearers, but out of the abundance with which he supplied them for the present they were admonished to provide by their own proper care and foresight for the morrow. Secondly, there may be an intimation of the sacredness of that which had been thus produced by a creative act of Divine goodness : it had not been forced from the earth by the sweat of man's brow : it was fresh with the savour and the life of heavenly blessing. Thirdly, it seems to have been symbolically connected with the future distribution of the bread of life, and the representation of its exceeding preciousness.

VERSES 15—21.

It is evident from the circumstances here mentioned, that if our Lord had not been very reserved in the exercise of his miraculous powers, it would have required a greater miracle than any which he had wrought to prevent the people from forcing him into a position inconsistent with his designs. The miracles, therefore, which he performed were cautiously restricted, both as to number and as to kind, to the simple purpose of proving his Divinity and his charity. Even in this, as we here learn, he stood exposed to the dangerous interruptions of popular excitement ; and could only escape them by withdrawing, from time to time, into the recesses of the mountains. But it is well worthy of observation, that while he thus concealed himself from the multitude, he gave his chosen followers one of the grandest proofs he had ever afforded of his Divinity. Whose step but that of the Son of God, made man, could have been set so firmly on the waves of the sea, raging in the midnight storm ?

VERSES 22—29.

The excitement created among the people by the miracle on the mountain was very general. It was communicated

by those who witnessed it to others whom they met on their way home. Thus there were some on one side of the lake, and some on the other, and curious stragglers from the neighbouring villages, looking out for Jesus. The foremost of the crowd questioned him in a tone of wonder, and shewed that they were aware of something remarkable in his passage from the mountains. But with all their expressions of awe and reverence, it was easy for Jesus to discover that it was not religion, but interest, which mainly induced them to wish him for a leader. They could not have witnessed the miracle without astonishment; but the strongest emotion of this kind is, with the generality of men, only temporary. The desire of gain, and all the various modifications of self-interest, are, on the contrary, permanent; and unless a living and a steady faith intervene, as the medium between these two extremes of violent excitement and habitual worldliness, there will be no true religion, no genuine piety. When our Lord spoke of labour to the multitude, he especially regarded their then state of mind, which he could see was totally taken up with the idea of present advantage. Earthly labour, in a certain sense, is the duty of all men; but to labour for the meat which perisheth, with that intense and engrossing anxiety which characterizes the efforts of most men in pursuit of earthly things, is both folly and sin; and it is against such a species of toil, against that desire of worldly advantages, which puts the fleeting things of time where the durable realities of eternity ought to be, that our Lord guards his followers. Labour is required for the bread of life, even though given by the Son of Man, sealed, anointed, set apart for that purpose by God. The labour necessary for this is according to the blessing sought. To believe, to accept the proffered mercy: to rejoice with a simple, resigned, thankful soul, in the free salvation of the Gospel, is to do the work of God; and if, in the very idea of labour, there is always involved that of difficulty and

effort, we may, in the case of faith, remember how much prayer is necessary ; how much thought on the Word of God; how earnest a use of the means of grace ; and how great watchfulness against temptation, to keep alive that faith given by the Holy Spirit, and yet coming by the hearing of the Word.

VERSES 30—40.

It is somewhat surprising to hear the people who had just seen his miracles, still asking our Lord, “What sign shewest thou then?” But the impression created by the miracle on the mountain, was already beginning to lose its force. They had felt, at first, that nothing could be better for them than to make Christ their king, and thus secure for themselves a perpetual freedom from toil by an easy appeal to the miraculous endowments of their chief. But they now began to consider, that they were giving their confidence at too cheap a rate ; that it was hardly wise to place such implicit trust in one who had only satisfied their hunger for a few hours ; and that, in fact, they ought not to follow him further, unless he could shew them credentials corresponding to those of Moses. Let him prove that they might depend upon his miracles not for a day merely, but for forty years, and they would no longer hesitate to resign themselves entirely to his dictation. But they were reasoning falsely in respect to Moses. Not Moses, but God gave the manna. That, indeed, was food from Heaven ; but it was only so in a lower sense ; the true bread from Heaven was now being provided by God ; bread really from Heaven ; and of such virtue, that it was to give life unto the world. To express a desire for such bread, was as consistent with the now more awakened, and, perhaps, somewhat more exalted feelings of the people, as it was agreeable to their earlier state of mind to think only of a grosser food. The answer to their wish, announces the greatest and

the most comforting of all mysteries. It is as the bread of life that Jesus is the immediate and felt support of the soul; and it is because he knew himself to be its proper and actual support, or fitted to become so, that he called himself the bread of life. In this case he plainly declared the truth. It was a simple statement for the use of those who were sensible of a hunger and thirst, which no means hitherto employed could satisfy; and which increased in exact proportion to their increasing sense of the renewed life of their inward being. There is a relation of the most direct kind between Jesus as the bread of life, and the soul of the believer. The Son of God could never have assumed the title, because he would never have possessed the character which he here gives himself, of the bread of life, had not the human soul required the nourishment which he alone can give; and the human soul would never have felt its dependence upon Jesus, had it not had such a nature, and such a life, and corresponding affections, as he alone can meet and satisfy. In employing the terms "cometh," and "believeth," he shews most clearly how he is the bread of life; coming to him, and believing in him, being, in respect to the soul, equivalent to what eating and drinking are to the body. Each is proper to its object, though neither could be used indiscriminately. By coming in the body to Christ, we satisfy neither its hunger nor thirst; because he is not the bread of life for the body as such. By eating Christ, if it were possible in a natural sense to do so, we could not satisfy the wants of the soul, because it cannot be fed as the body is. But by coming to Christ, that is, by seeking him in the desire of the soul, by embracing him with all its affections and hopes, we avail ourselves of his grace in such a way as is proper to the nature of our inner being; and so feed upon him, not in the way of mere language, of symbol, or figure, but really and truly, as far as our souls are concerned, as the bread of life. Bread to the body is accounted

a reality, because it feeds it : that which really feeds the soul is the soul's bread : but, both the one and the other is bread, according to the nature of that which it feeds. Bread is but a name signifying that which nourishes. Its meaning depends in no wise upon the manner in which it is received. The body receives its food in one way : the soul in another ; as the food of the one differs from that of the other. In the one case, it is an earthly and material substance : in the other, it is spiritual and heavenly. The mode of receiving the one or the other, is necessarily different ; but as the object in both cases is the same, that is, the nourishment of the recipient, the word "bread," is as proper in the one case as in the other. Our Lord told the Jews that they had seen him, but not believed. Thus he was not to them the bread which they seemed so anxious to obtain, when they said, "Evermore give us this bread." Had they believed in him, he would have become to them all that was necessary to the saving of their souls. A new subject seems to be started when he says, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me :" but it is immediately connected with the main topic of the discourse. In whatever way, or by whatever decree, the people of Christ become his, they come to him, because he is their bread of life. It does not seem, therefore, that the Father's gift of a people is here particularly mentioned for the sake of the doctrine involved in that gift, but mainly to shew that in the case of all those who are saved, the means of salvation, because the means of life, is Christ himself, upon whom, in the way proper to the spiritual nature, they feed as the bread of life. And thus everlasting life is appointed them, not absolutely, not without a medium, but on the condition, that they see and believe on Jesus, who then, by his quickening influence, will raise them up at the last day. A blessed truth for all who are prepared to receive it.

VERSES 41—47.

Two particulars are to be observed in this passage. The Jews murmured, generally, because our Lord said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven:” but their anger was not so much excited at his calling himself the bread of life, as at his saying that he came down from heaven. The former expression they could explain away: the latter they felt compelled to acknowledge implied an assertion of Divinity; and with all their folly, they would not trifle with words where the meaning was obvious. The next point to be remarked is, that Jesus compassionately sought to silence the vain disputes and janglings of the Jews, among themselves, on these difficult topics. They would never, he told them, without Divine help, understand Divine mysteries. To know him as the bread of life, or to believe that he came down from Heaven, they must be under the influence and the teaching of God. The force of that teaching can alone overcome the pride of human reason; the resistance and sophistries of the heart. God does not refuse to grant this help to those whom he calls. The instruction which he so bestows upon his people is effective for the purpose designed; but it is not of the same full and distinct kind as that which they afterwards receive by the larger ministrations of grace; nor is it to be compared to that knowledge which the Son has ever had of the Father, beholding him face to face, or to which even the believer shall attain, when the Son shall, himself, reveal to him the Father. Belief is the condition of this knowledge: and it is the condition of everlasting life.

VERSES 48—59.

“The bread of life,” “bread from Heaven,” and “the living bread,” are designations, each of which adds force to the other. As the bread of life, Jesus is the food of souls;

CHAPTER VII.

VERSES 1—9.

"After these things," may either refer to the occurrences just recorded, to those mentioned in Chapter V., or to others, of which we have no account in this Gospel, but which were referred to in the notes which St. John employed while writing his narrative. It matters little which view be adopted; according to either, we have a striking illustration of the prudence with which Jesus acted, exposing himself in no case to danger which might be avoided; not because he could not readily have delivered himself from the impending distress; but, because he would not multiply occasions for the exercise of power, where wisdom and foresight would suffice. His brethren, here spoken of, were probably cousins, or other relations. Their feelings were of a very complex character. They doubted Jesus; natural relationship, the ties of blood, having no influence adequate to the want of Divine grace. But though they questioned his Divinity, or his claims as Messiah, they were not wholly blind to the dignity of his character, or to the wonderful things which he had done. Their words, "Depart hence," were spoken in taunt, but not wholly so. They were not indifferent to the fame of Jesus, and, though they now did not believe in him, would have been glad to raise themselves, and their family, by his credit. Jesus knew them well; and warned them of their worldly spirit. He would not join them. Their temper was very different to that with which he was about to attend the feast; nor was his time come, till he had fulfilled every work of charity, which he purposed to accomplish, before he left Galilee.

VERSES 10—13.

The presence of Jesus at the feast was confidently expected. It was one of the grand occasions, on which the devout Jew could best shew his loyalty to the Divine government, of which his nation still deemed it might boast. Jesus had desired to avoid public observation at the beginning. This afforded time for the discussion of his character. The season had brought Jews together from all parts; and the opinions expressed were as various as the circumstances, and the dispositions of the individuals who composed the multitude. But the natural expression of opinion was suppressed by a tyranny as destructive of truth, as it was ruinous to liberty. A stronger proof could scarcely be given of the unfitness of the men of that age to form a right judgment of the Gospel, or of Jesus, than the striking fact, that fear prevented those who were most anxious to learn the truth, from saying what they felt.

VERSES 14—24.

It was when the largest number of people was assembled, and when attention could be most profitably secured, that Jesus went up to the Temple. His doctrine and mode of teaching, compelled his enemies to confess an unwilling reverence. He exhibited the results of the maturest learning; yet learning he had not. He spoke the language of the choicest wisdom, and yet had never entered the school of either philosopher or scribe. But he earnestly deprecated the notion that he spoke of himself, or taught doctrines originating in his own self-will. He came to proclaim the eternal and universal truth, as seen in the will of God; and one of the greatest of the practical lessons which he taught, is this, that to do the will of God, that is, to obey him as far as he reveals himself to us, is the surest way to learn the truth,

or to determine whether any doctrine proposed to us, be of him, or not. The Jews had a law, which they confessed to be the law of God : but they were guilty of the most flagrant violations of this rule, acknowledged to be Divine. Were they likely to know the truth ? Had they any right to think themselves proper judges of Divine mysteries ? Their endeavour to destroy Jesus, against whom no charge could be justly made, was a sufficient proof of their violation of the law. The multitude who heard him speak of these things, could not understand his meaning. They were not in the secret of the Scribes and Pharisees. Many of them, therefore, expressed an unfeigned astonishment and anger, when he charged them with the attempt to put him to death. The few who were well aware of the machinations of the rulers, were not backward to affect surprise : but Jesus understood both the ignorance of the one party, and the deceit of the other. Reproof, in such a case, would have been vain. He, therefore, referred to the pretended cause of the enmity against him. The cure of the poor man at the pool of Bethesda had not been forgotten. Resentment still rankled in the bosoms of those who had been so severely rebuked by Jesus for their inconsistency and hypocrisy. Their zeal for the Sabbath was a mere pretence. That which Jesus had done, in curing a man of his infirmity, on the Sabbath, was no more a violation of the law than any performance of a religious rite for the private benefit of an individual. Had they judged according to the nature of things : according to principle, and not appearance, they would never have committed such offences against common truth and equity.

VERSES 25—31.

To those inhabitants of Jerusalem, who knew with what hatred their rulers beheld the proceedings of Jesus, it must have been matter of surprise that they left him so long at

liberty. Did they, indeed, know him to be the Messiah? Did they even suspect that he was that expected deliverer, but come in a character so different to that which they desired? There were circumstances, in the history of Jesus, quite sufficient, it was supposed, to disprove every notion of this kind. How could the son of a carpenter: the inhabitant of Nazareth; and whose whole family was known for its poverty and insignificance, be the anointed of God? the heir of all the kingdoms of the world? Jesus acknowledged that they might trace his lineage; and that they knew whence he was, referring, probably, to his mere human descent and circumstances. But this could not lessen his claims to the dignity of Messiah. He came as sent by God; and, precisely of that lineage, and under those circumstances, which Divine wisdom had foreordained, and Almighty Providence had brought to pass. The direct appeal which he made to them "who is true," seems to have increased the wrath of his enemies; but it had also the effect of moving others to a more earnest consideration of his acts, and they ended by becoming believers.

VERSES 32—39.

The Evangelist gives us only the heads of the discourse which passed between Jesus and his adversaries. But these fragments are full of massive information. They indicate the agitation, modified by a spirit of cautious and intense enquiry, which prevailed in Jerusalem. The officers sent to apprehend Jesus, did not execute their mission. They had, doubtless, been told to act according to circumstances. Jesus not only knew that they had no power to take him, but wished to make them feel that he understood their weak and vacillating counsels. The little while still needed for the accomplishment of his designs they could not shorten; and when that was past, they would have to seek far otherwise than they now pursued him. Gross as their minds were, when they asked, "Will he

go into other lands? will he seek the remnants of Israel scattered among the heathen?"—the question was not put without a feeling, that more was meant by Jesus, than any such enquiry as this could meet. As the feast approached its termination, and the people were about to disperse, Jesus proclaimed a truth, precious as any which he had yet uttered, and in close harmony with that which he taught, when he said, "I am the bread of life." As the hunger of our inner nature is satisfied by this bread; so its thirst is quenched by this living water. In each case, the want is supplied by the act of the soul coming unto, and apprehending, Jesus. The blessing, in the latter instance, is represented as communicative. He who drinks of the water of life, that is, who partakes, thankfully, of the gifts of the blessed Spirit, will be permitted to impart to others that wisdom, and those manifold consolations, which he himself enjoys. It is generally considered, that our Lord took occasion to deliver this great doctrine and prophecy respecting the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, from a custom observed at the Feast of Tabernacles. A priest, on each of the seven days of the feast, was sent with a sacred vessel, to draw water from the fountain of Siloam. The water being brought to the Temple, was poured out at the altar, with every expression of joy and thanksgiving, a lively emblem being thus exhibited, both of the natural blessings of the season, and of those higher gifts of grace which the water of the fountain was known to represent. Isaiah beautifully alludes to this custom, (chap. xii.,) and while the priest was repairing to the altar, the assembled congregation sang aloud the 113th and 118th Psalms, appointed for the solemnity.

VERSES 40—44.

There was a power in the words which our Lord had spoken, which prejudice could not wholly withstand. Hence, some who heard him, thought they discovered in his discourse, signs

of the great prophet, vaguely, but fervently expected. Others went further, and believed him to be the Messiah. But their supposed acquaintance with facts, of which they were, in reality, ignorant, again stood in the way of their conversion. They rejected Christ for the very reasons which, had they known the truth, they would have received him. He did, indeed, come out of Galilee, but he was not of Galilee. The circumstance on which they insisted, was, itself, true ; but it was not in such a way true, that it precluded Jesus from the signs of Messiah : a descent from David ; and a birth at Bethlehem. How careful we ought to be, when we receive or reject a statement on historical grounds, to see whether we know all the circumstances necessary to the question.

VERSES 45—53.

Bold as were some, and those the main body of the Priests and Pharisees, in their readiness to condemn Jesus, there was not sufficient unanimity in their meeting to accomplish this design. Nicodemus was one among many, who, though they had not sufficient courage openly to espouse the cause of Jesus, yet greatly interrupted the proceedings of his enemies. No officers of a public body could have dared to return with the answer now given to the Priests and Pharisees, by their servants, had they not seen good reason to believe that some, at least, of the chief among them, would approve their conduct. The rude attack upon Nicodemus shews how little respect was paid to the spirit of fair and honest enquiry among the Jews of that period.

CHAPTER VIII.

VERSES 1—11.

The miserable creature here spoken of, was not, probably, any newly detected victim of vice ; but some poor, unhappy wretch, whom the Pharisees had brought from the haunts of wickedness, merely to elicit the judgment of Christ on a point of law ; and then entangle him in a contradiction. But he refused the appeal. He would not act as a judge under the law. The letter of the law was imperative in the case of the adulteress, and had he been entitled, in his human capacity, to pronounce a sentence of any kind, he must have condemned her. To have acquitted her formally would have been to set aside the law, and this would have exposed him to the charge of sacrificing justice to licentiousness. His course was to act simply as an individual, who had no legal right either to acquit or condemn. He denoted by stooping, and writing on the ground, that he was unwilling even to notice the culprit, or her accusers. When compelled to listen to the latter, he made no reply which could be connected in any way with the legal question of guilt or punishment, but referred them, from himself, to their own consciences, that they might determine, if private judgment was to be at all exercised, whether the woman should be put to death, or spared. There could be no doubt of their legal right to decide on her punishment, had they kept to the law. But they had given up that strong position by appealing to the judgment of Jesus. They had no right to do so ; and probably would not, or dared not have done it, had there not been something in this woman's case, which rendered a less rigid mode of proceeding allowable. The appeal to their feelings, therefore, exercised its full force, and they took advantage of the secret nature of their proceeding, to escape from the dilemma in which they had so un-

expectedly involved themselves. Jesus did not condemn the wretched woman : but neither did he acquit her. He could not do the latter judicially any more than the former. But so far does he appear to have been from shewing any particular mercy to this adulteress, that not a sentence fell from his lips, like “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” Had her case elicited his compassion, as that of a penitent sinner, some such words as these might have been looked for. But he simply dismissed her ; and “Sin no more,” was a warning, not an absolution.

VERSES 12—20.

It does not appear to have been in reference to any preceding discourse that our Lord now spoke. “The light of the world,” and “the light of life,” are expressions which give us a further knowledge of the wonderful blessings which emanate from him as the Saviour of them that believe. There is light in the word of truth ; light in the law of God ; but the light which flows from Christ is “the light of life ;” it has a quickening as well as an illuminating power ; and is enjoyed, and acts through the medium of the faith which brings us to him, in close accordance with the same rule and principle by which he is the “bread of life” and “living water” to those who come to him. That he bore testimony of himself in thus speaking was true, and he had a full right to be witness of himself. But he did not bear this witness in the way in which the Pharisees supposed. In a former conversation (chap. v. 31) he expressly stated, “If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.” But here he was speaking formally of his first credentials as Messiah ; while in this latter case, he was referring incidentally only to the claims which he had as the Son of God. Had he really been his own witness, depending, that is, on the testimony which he could bear to himself, his witness would not have been true ; because it had been foretold by all the pro-

phets, and it was necessary, according to the very nature of the new covenant, that the Redeemer should not be left depending upon what he, himself, should say, but should also have the witness of the Father, and, subordinate to that, the collective witness of his forerunner, and all the types and symbols of the ancient dispensation. Had he been one, therefore, who bore witness of himself, independent of these witnesses, his witness would not have been true. But when he made incidental assertions respecting his nature, his power, and attributes, he only bore witness of himself, according to the argument of which every spiritual mind might see the force. Had not his enemies judged after the flesh, they might have readily discovered that he was the light of the world. He knew his own high nature ; his descent, and his appointment to glory. This gave him a right to speak of himself. His enemies had obstinately closed their eyes to the signs of his power. Yet, ignorant as they were, they ventured to judge him, while he, strikingly shewing the contrast between their mode of reasoning and his own, would not, individually or privately, or from selfish considerations, judge any man, but only according to the will and the law of God. When he further speaks of himself, and his Father, as two witnesses, he supposes, as it were, that some question has been proposed, and that he and his Father have answered it. And is it possible to conceive of two higher witnesses to a truth ? Unhappily for those with whom he was conversing, and for innumerable others, neither he, nor his Father, was known. When either the one or the other is really known, the other is, eventually, sure to be known also. The bold and solemn doctrine which Jesus thus taught, must have tended greatly to deepen the indignation of the Pharisees ; but their hands, as well as their eyes, were holden.

VERSES 21—32.

The fulfilment of our Lord's sufferings, and his ascension into glory, were followed by times of calamity for the Jews, in which they sighed, in bitter anguish for a Messiah, whom they were now never to find. In seeking a Messiah, they sought Jesus, without knowing it; and, dying in sin, could never enter his kingdom. Belief in him was then, as it is now, the only remedy against the guilt or the power of sin. This, only, could convert those who were originally earthly, into children of God, and heirs of heaven. The often repeated enquiry, "Who art thou?" had been as often answered. Sometimes by miracles; sometimes by reference to prophecy; and, at others, by direct assertion. From the beginning, Jesus had declared himself the Christ and the Son of God. That which he said, and the judgments which he passed, were equally from the one source of eternal truth and righteousness in his Father. Of this, the gross minds of his hearers could form no proper conception. The result of his crucifixion, with the wonders which followed, was the conversion of many, who, at present, knew him not. Others upon whom Divine grace exercised no power, yet learnt to own him in the mortal terrors which came upon them; and, at the end of all, it shall be discovered by unbelievers, of every age and degree, that, whatever he did, was done according to the appointment of the one God, the Father Almighty. Happy were they who allowed what he now said, to work effectually upon their minds; but even then, and when Jesus was personally the teacher, there might be a conviction, which was only to endure a while. It is to a persevering faith that the substantial privileges and honours of discipleship are promised; and of these, the most conspicuous is the freedom which truth gives: freedom of mind from debasing errors, and the power of the father of lies: freedom of heart from the

audacious invasion of the world ; freedom of the whole man from the darkness in which deceit and falsehood envelope him till the light of truth shine freely upon his soul.

VERSES 33—43.

Like others who listen impatiently to instruction or reproof, the Jews rarely attended to the whole of what Jesus said ; but eagerly caught hold of some one word, and upon that founded their objection. He was here certainly not speaking of worldly freedom or bondage. Even if he had been alluding to such a topic, the boast of his opponents would have been an utter falsehood ; for their nation had suffered frequent defeats, the providential punishment of their sins, and it was at this very time, in bondage to the Romans. But our Lord passed from both subjects to a very plain and practical one. Instead of reminding them of their history, or speaking again of truth, as the source of freedom, a topic too lofty for their feeble understanding, he admonished them that there is a servitude to sin which is far more degrading than any other species of bondage. And to make this evident, he referred them to their own common experience, which would shew them, as is the case with all men, that every sin committed is the consequence of some evil principle which compels obedience to its dictates with all the force of a tyrant. But this mention of servitude was proper to introduce another important lesson. A servant of sin certainly "abideth not in the house for ever," whether that house be considered as the present world, or as the house of God, his kingdom or church. This was a warning to the poor sophists who were endeavouring to resist the pure wisdom of their gracious teacher. But he added an intimation full of mercy and encouragement. Under whatever light they were to be considered servants, whether as in bondage to a worldly power, in bondage to error or to sin, if they became obedient to him,

the Son of God, the heir of an everlasting kingdom, he would bestow upon them a freedom, which should extend to every faculty of their nature, and to every circumstance in which they could exist. To all, however, which he could say on this subject, there was the proud answer, "We are the children of Abraham." They forgot that they might be the seed of Abraham; that is, his descendants according to the flesh, and yet not be his children, as he was the father of the faithful, that relationship to which the promises of an abiding glory exclusively pertained. Had these miserable disputants been really the children of Abraham, according to the Spirit, they would have done the works of Abraham, and certainly not have meditated the destruction of a teacher like Jesus. Still more obviously were they the children of Satan, and not of God, who owns none as his children, in the proper sense of the word, who are not the offspring of his Spirit, and, therefore, lovingly subject to his will. All this was unintelligible to the Jews; but only so through their own wilful darkness. They did not understand the purport of our Lord's reasoning, because they refused to attend to him with the patience and humility, the want of which is equivalent to moral incapacity.

VERSES 44—50.

Though only incidentally given, the portraiture which our Lord here draws of Satan is as terrible for its distinctness, as its truth. Whatever we know of the pride, the malice, the base prejudices, and corresponding lusts of the worst of our race, we know of the features of Satan, for the vices of the human soul are but copies of these, their original. Then: "there is no truth in him." A more appalling object for contemplation, cannot be found than this. A being of vast capacity; endowed with life, and all its powers, but wholly destitute of truth! To think of such a being is like looking down into an unfathomable pit, impregnate on all sides, and

throughout, with the most vigorous life, but utterly without light. Thus destitute of truth, he is the direct and unwearied antagonist of truth ; and then, to make the horrors which attend the movements of this ancient and universal enemy of man more palpable, we are reminded that, as a liar, so also he was a murderer, from the beginning. What stronger features can we need to prove the real being, the real presence, the real acts of Satan ? Or, what sinner can fail to tremble, when compelled to own himself the child of a father like this ! The great argument against the Jews, was, their refusal to hear the truth as spoken by Jesus. Let the worldly, the thoughtless, and impenitent, try themselves by the same test. The children of God cannot but delight to hear his words. Others cannot hear them, for want of that spiritual life and organisation, without which, Divine things are as imperceptible as earthly things to the defective or dormant senses of the body. The insulting expressions with which these truths were met, shew the frightful debasement of the people to whom they were addressed. Our Lord's simple repetition of his appeal to God, is equally pathetic and sublime.

VERSES 51—59.

The controversy between our Lord and the Jews, is reported in this chapter with wonderful force and distinctness. We have only the most remarkable sayings on either side ; but they are amply sufficient to shew both the points in dispute, and the mode in which they were treated. Thus, having contrasted the life and power of the truth which he declared, with the deadly malice of Satan ; and having asserted his own sonship with God, Jesus now puts forth a new claim to reverence. By believing in him, by accepting the truth which he reveals, a man may make himself free. This was his first announcement : but now he adds, that there is another consequence to be confidently looked for, from receiving and keeping

the truth thus delivered. It secures not only freedom, but life. "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." In whatever sense this is true, it is true in a higher sense than that in which the world believes it. But when it is taken in connection with the other statements of our Lord on the same subject, and in especial reference to the restored life of the soul by the agency of the Divine Spirit, we cannot help discovering a meaning in these words far more immediate, far more applicable to present desires, to present fears and hopes, than that which would refer it to a distant resurrection, or a remote futurity. The plainest interpretation is generally the best. Why should it not be so here? And taking it to be so, we learn from this most precious and comforting assurance of the Lord of life, that if we keep his saying, we shall never see death. It matters not, practically, how it is, that by virtue of a faithful keeping of Christ's words, we secure life. But it may be either in the way of a covenant: that is, if we observe his Gospel, he will constantly bestow upon us a living and quickening grace: or, it may be according to the proper nature and influence of his word, so that we keeping it, may always find it to be a sustaining principle of life, sufficient in itself to supply us with animation, or a certain link between us and the Divine Spirit. Let it, however, be in which way it may, here is the promise. On receiving Jesus, who is "the resurrection and the life," we pass from death unto life: and by remaining faithful to him, we retain the principle which thus delivered us from him who has the power of death. The life thus gained belongs to our inner nature; and there is no reason whatsoever to suppose that the mere change, or decay of our bodies, of a totally different constitution, should affect, or shorten, much less, at any time, extinguish the life thus bestowed upon our nobler faculties. Whether able or not to comprehend the mystery, this ought to be enough for the believer. Jesus has told him he shall never die, if he

keep his saying. Let him keep it, and set death at defiance. Let him not explain away the better part of his Lord's meaning, by supposing that it refers to the future. It belongs to the present as well as to after times, or eternity. "He that believeth in me, shall never die." The Jews objected that Abraham was dead. They were mistaken even in this. Abraham had put off his corruptible body. But Abraham was alive, and with God; for "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Jesus again sought to put them right on the subject of his own divinity. His words conveyed a somewhat different meaning to their ears to what they bear to ours. In saying that Abraham rejoiced to see his day, he might have meant, we should suppose, that Abraham prophetically foresaw his coming. But the Jews regarded it as an assertion that he had conversed with Abraham. According to common belief, our Lord was now only thirty-three, or thirty-four years old. His weariness, or contemplative look, might give him the appearance of an older man. But, naturally, he could never have seen Abraham. How was it then? He had seen Abraham, and Abraham had rejoiced to contemplate his mission to this world, because that faithful patriarch had known him from the first, as the only begotten of the Father, the Lamb of God, appointed to take away the sins of the world. The meaning of this was plainly perceived; and Jesus only escaped the malice of those whom he would have thus instructed, by hiding himself from their pursuit.

CHAPTER IX.

VERSES 1—7.

Sin, rebellion, that is, against God, the supreme good, may be accounted as the original cause of whatever evil we suffer. But though it be right to refer all distress to this first source of evil, it is not always consistent with truth to ascribe personal affliction to the individual sin of the sufferer. His sorrow would not have existed, had there been no sin: but it may not have been his sin which caused the affliction: it may not even have been the sin of his parents; or of any of those connected with him; it may have originated in the general circumstances of the world, permitted by God, in their common operation, to reach and afflict this or that individual, for objects not always revealed, but always connected with the glory of God, and purposes of combined wisdom and mercy. In the case of the blind man, there were, probably, many reasons why the affliction was allowed to assail him. With these the disciples of Jesus had no concern, except in one respect. It was in that which made the blind man an object of their Master's compassion, and a fit subject for the exercise of his power. Jesus came to do the works of God. He did them by proving his complete authority over all nature, and then using the homage thus gained for God, as the Lord of the universe, to promote his moral and spiritual empire in the hearts of penitent sinners. When Jesus again spoke of himself as the light of the world, he seems to have made a double reference, first alluding to the darkness which prevails where he is not present to give sight to the blind; and then to the necessity of a general application of his power while the season of grace lasts, which is often, as in the first era, succeeded by a period of destitution and darkness. The means which he used to cure the blind man were, obviously, only signs.

By the clay, perhaps, was represented the utter earthliness of mere bodily vision : by the waters of Siloam, in which that clay was washed off, were typified the graces of the Holy Spirit ; secured by "the sent," the Shiloh, that is, the great Apostle of God, even Jesus himself.

VERSES 8—17.

There is all the truthfulness of nature and reality in this account of the blind man and his acquaintances. Some of the latter believed at once, on the evidence of their own eyes, that the blind beggar had been restored to sight. Others would rather doubt their own senses than believe such a wonder. The man, himself, put an end to the dispute. He gave them a full account of the manner in which his eyes were opened, every circumstance of the cure having been strongly impressed upon his mind. But it was the miracle itself, and not the author of it, which interested him. He had recovered his sight. The means employed were strange, and still engaged his curiosity ; but he had, as yet, little desire to follow Jesus. He was wholly occupied with the new position in which he found himself placed by the sudden recovery of his sight. An hour before this, he was a poor, helpless mendicant. He might now take his place in the world as well as any other man. But these pleasant thoughts of prosperity were speedily disturbed by the appearance of the Pharisees. He had to take part in a controversy which endangered his safety on the one side, and his honesty on the other. But it had this good result. It awakened him to a sense of the gratitude due to Jesus, and, notwithstanding all the threatening words and looks of the Pharisees, he boldly proclaimed him a prophet.

VERSES 18—23.

The Jews were fully justified in their strict enquiry into the truth of the miracle; and it ought to be regarded as a fact of great value, in the way of Christian evidence, that we have incontrovertible proof of the caution with which the things done by Jesus, were sifted and examined. A more proper course could not have been adopted than that here taken by the Jews. The man's blindness might have been only partial, or of late occurrence. Or he might have had a character little deserving of credit; and, in either case, if his parents were reputable people, their answers to a fair enquiry might prevent imposture. Whatever their character, if properly cross-questioned, they could not wholly conceal the truth. There was no injustice, therefore, in this proceeding of the Jews. Their sin began when they refused to yield honestly to the result of their own investigation.

VERSES 24—34.

As the man was "again called," the examination of his parents was evidently carried on apart. They had said enough to prove that a miracle had really been wrought. But to confess this, would have been to confess Jesus. Nothing, therefore, remained for them, but to persuade both themselves and the man, that the cure ought to be ascribed to some accident, or to an unexpected act of Divine mercy. Had they been contented with speaking of the miracle only, the man, in his present state of feeling, not yet ardent for his benefactor, might have remained silent. But he was too honest to hear Jesus vilified as a sinner, and not resent the insult. His reasoning was that of a mind only slowly opening to conviction. He did not dare, at first, positively to deny that Jesus might be a sinner, for he was, probably, uncertain as to whether he had not really broken the Sabbath

by making the clay with which he anointed his eyes. When he found, by their further questioning, that they were only endeavouring to entrap him in some contradiction, he gathered fresh courage, and ended by advancing an argument of great force. A wonderful miracle had been wrought. This could no longer be denied. It was equally clear that it had been wrought by Jesus. In this case, no evil spirit could be concerned. It was not the kind of wonder ever attributed to demoniac power. Whence then the might by which it was accomplished? Was it merely human? No one could believe this. And if of God, was it possible that God would commit his power for such a purpose, to a sinner and blasphemer? The antagonists of the man who could reason thus, had no other alternative but to thrust him out.

VERSES 35—41.

Our Lord was mercifully ready to receive this expelled member of the synagogue at the instant of his expulsion. And thus it always is with those who leave aught for Christ. Faith, in its lowest degrees, if it be living and active, will lead the believer to risk and endure much. But he would not be able to sustain the trial, were he not experimentally and consciously found of Jesus; and did he not understand in his heart, that he is questioned as to his belief; that he has owned the vagueness of his notions, and then been graciously aided by the more distinct communications of the Saviour. It was the blessed announcement, plain and direct, "It is he that talketh with thee," which completed the man's conversion, and enabled him to answer, with the full meaning of the expression, "Lord, I believe." The judgment of which Jesus here spoke, is that of discrimination: the setting on this side and on that of the two great classes of mankind, now indiscriminately mixed together. In the world, men without wisdom claim credit for its highest gifts,

and the really wise are accounted fools. It is not so in the kingdom which Jesus establishes. To those who proudly suppose they see, he denies light; while to the humble and meek, who have readily confessed their native blindness, he imparts the brightest beams of Divine intelligence. In all cases, the boast of virtue not possessed or practised, increases the sin of him who breaks its precepts. To assume the dignity, or lay claim to the praise, which belongs to wisdom, while the mind is the willing slave of folly, is precisely analogous to the sin of a man, who, being blind, should render himself responsible for all the duties of those who can see. His blindness being confessed, would have rendered him an object of pity: being denied, he is guilty of a crime in every failure to which it may expose him. Such is the case with sinners in respect to God. Let them confess their darkness, and he will have mercy upon them. Let them pretend to wisdom and knowledge, and there is no promise to meet their necessity.

C H A P T E R X.

VERSES 1—10.

God, from his first dealings with mankind, instituted a rule, obedience or disobedience to which was the alternative of good or ill. Whether it be a covenant of works, or a covenant of grace; whether we find ourselves condemned and perishing under the law, or re-awakened to hope by the Gospel, the dispensation is of God, and the greatest, as well as the most fatal, of all follies committed by man, is to hope for a deliverance which would imply the defeat of Divine justice and supreme wisdom. But God has ever indicated his readiness to accept the penitent sinner, seeking a refuge from deserved wrath. To save such, he has hedged round his sanctuary from the destroyer, and opened one door into it for

the humble believer. This door, as at first known, was the rule or method of the dispensation under which the penitent lived. Acknowledgment of sin, and a thankful acceptance of all the means of grace, as then known, formed the door by which he was to enter into the fold. Had he set at nought these things, and entered the fold some other way, he would have been but a thief and a robber. This would have been pre-eminently the case with any one who pretended to be the shepherd of the flock; the guide and instructor of sinners. Of all men, it is their especial duty to obey the method laid down by God, for the restitution of his people. But the true door into the sheepfold, is Jesus himself. He was so, though unrevealed, from the beginning, it being in virtue of his sacrifice alone, that any other sacrifice, or rite, had any acceptance with God. Jesus now plainly declares himself to be that door: that "new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us," (Heb. x. 20) that is, we have an entrance into the fold of God, in virtue of his atonement and intercession; and when we humbly desire to be admitted into the fold, he, who has charge of the entrance, primarily God himself, suffers us to enter for the very sake of Jesus. In this manner, he is the door to all who enter the fold. At the beginning of the parable, the allusion is chiefly to shepherds of the sheep: to the ministers of Jesus, who, let it ever be remembered, are but thieves and robbers, if they enter not the fold through him. But the application is made general by the expressions, "I am the door of the sheep;" and, "By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved." To go in and out of this fold, signifies, that, while it is a place of most happy security, it leaves those who belong to it at perfect liberty to do the will of God wheresoever Jesus may lead them; and wherever he leads them, there, they may be sure, will be refreshing pastures, and waters of comfort. Very different is the object of those who seek men's souls only that they may make a gain

of them, from the purpose of him who came to endow them, at his own expense, with a higher and purer life.

VERSES 11—18.

Having spoken of himself in relation to the means and method of salvation, our Lord now shews that he is also the chief minister of that salvation. In respect to pardon and peace, to justification and final acceptance with God, he is the only source of righteousness, and is, therefore, the door of the sheep, the only way they can possibly have of entering his fold, his sanctuary, or kingdom. But in respect to the administering of this method of salvation, Jesus appears under another character. We now see him as the chief shepherd of the sheep, as the guide and teacher of those who have been admitted into a state of salvation for his sake. The first great proof which he gave of entire faithfulness and devotion in this office, was his readiness to lay down his life for the sheep. No hireling would have done this. But Jesus knows his people; and loves them with a perfection and intensity proportionable to his assurance of their growing likeness to himself. And they know him; their acquaintance with him increasing with their increasing experience of his grace. The fold of which he spoke as "this fold" was the fold of God's people, as it would be understood by his hearers. In that particular sense, that is, in a Jewish sense, Jesus had other sheep "not of that fold." But the "one fold" was soon to be established, or rather it was soon to be shewn that there never was, in reality, but one fold, as there is "only one name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." By laying down his life, with an especial reference to taking it again, our Lord fulfilled the entire purpose of his Father in the salvation of his people. When speaking of taking his life again, he might possibly only intend to prove more distinctly that in dying he did not yield

to the force of man, but to the justice and will of his Father, and that, therefore, notwithstanding all man could do, he would rise again and live. But that he should thus rise ; that he should live again in the manifest perfection of his human nature, was as much a part of the great work of redemption as the death upon the cross ; and thus it was just as necessary to the accomplishment of God's design that Jesus should "take it again," as it was that he should lay down his life. Had it been possible for the Son of God to do, in this respect, only half the will of his Father, he might have satisfied his justice by dying in the flesh,—by surrendering his human life on the cross to the demands of the law, and there have left it, and never assumed it again. But then he could not have said as here, "Therefore doth my Father love me." The word translated "power" in this passage strictly means authority. Jesus had "power" in his nature to rise again : but as to his office he received "authority" so to rise.

VERSES 19—21.

Well might there be a breaking up of the surface of opinions under a weight like that with which Jesus assailed the prejudices of his hearers ! In the agitation thus created, it was hardly possible that there should not be many striking ebullitions of contrary feeling ; of thoughts suddenly elicited, and escaping without intention ; and hence producing the excitement so graphically described.

VERSES 22—33.

The Feast of the Dedication was kept in December, and lasted eight days. This is probably the beginning of an entirely new section in the general narrative. If not, we must suppose that the two months which intervened between the Feast of Tabernacles (see chap. viii. 2) and the present festival, were occupied by our Lord as commonly described,

and did not require a more particular chronicle. Solomon's porch was the most convenient resort during the winter months. From the nature of the question with which the Jews addressed our Lord, he seems of late to have said and done many things calculated to shake even the most obstinate of his antagonists. "How long dost thou make us to doubt?" But they wanted a stronger degree of evidence in the way of miracles; proofs to the outward senses which should cure the soul of all its disorders. And this was an impossibility. Enough had been done to answer honest doubts, and remove difficulties which belong more to the understanding than the affections. This was so far successful that it compelled the most scornful spirit to feel that there was much more in the pretensions of Christ, than he would willingly have acknowledged. But there the process stopped. These disputants could not believe. They needed the living grace, without which truth falls powerless upon the heart. That principle unsought or uncherished, there is no union with Christ, no entering his fold, no participation in his blessings. As we look at this on the one side, we see the cold, proud heart wanting faith, because it refuses to humble itself, and seek it; and looking at the same subject, on the other side, we see that same heart rejecting truth, refusing to believe, because, having despised the means of grace, it is now to be punished for its sin, and it is unable to believe, because it is unable to join itself to Christ. "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep." The people of Christ know his voice, as the sheep their shepherd's; and as they implicitly obey him, so he fulfils his merciful intentions in their behalf, giving them eternal life, that first, best gift of God, when combined, as in this case, with the riches of his love and blessing. They are Christ's, as bestowed upon him by his Father. How or when is not here made the subject of enquiry. Believers in him are his regenerate, and sanctified people: they are sharers of

of repentance needed no credentials of that sort. He did not come to establish a new dispensation. No faith in his case was called for, but that which had a sufficient basis in the law and the prophets. In one point there was an exception to the strictness with which the Baptist adhered to the stern preaching of repentance. He described Jesus as the Lamb of God: foretold his baptism of the Spirit, and marked broadly the path which he would take in establishing his kingdom. The discourses of the Saviour himself, and this correspondence between his character and the predictions of the Baptist, bore conviction to many hearts, hitherto opposed, or indifferent, to the Gospel.

CHAPTER XI.

VERSES 1—14.

The interest and importance of the following narrative are so striking, that it seems to stand alone, a separate and distinct part of the Gospel. But it is not so in reality. Our Lord had come within moderate reach of a message from Bethany. That he kept at that distance is explained by his wish to avoid the precipitate entreaties of Mary and her sister. It is certain, however, that he had not come so near the borders of Judæa without looking forward to this occasion for the manifestation of his power, and no less exquisitely tender friendship. As there was a preparation for the miracle in the arrangement of his journey, so the events which followed arose from the circumstances immediately connected with this wonderful occurrence. Instead, therefore, of viewing it as an isolated event, we may more properly regard it as forming the central point of the concluding section of St. John's narrative, and as intended to exhibit an instance of the most stupendous of our Lord's operations in unison with the profoundest of his doctrines. Mary is mentioned by a

description which had rendered her famous throughout the whole community of believers. Jesus had promised that her act of reverential love, here alluded to, should never be forgotten. But this is alluded to by anticipation. Both she and Martha were filled with the profoundest love for Jesus. In this holy sentiment Lazarus joined; and the affection which they thus cherished, was met by Jesus with a tenderness, which retained the mild graces of a human friendship amid the awe and sublimity of a Divine presence. It was with a feeling of trust that the sisters sent to Jesus in this season of their distress. Their appeal was directly to his friendship. They might have asked him, as others had done, to work a miracle for them. But they only told him their anxiety, and awaited the result. Jesus chose to try their faith. They saw their brother sink rapidly under his disease, and die. To his disciples, our Lord had said enough to explain the reason why he did not hasten to the bed-side of his expiring friend. The sisters had a lesson to learn. Something was wanting to their faith, temper, and experience, which this trial was to supply. The disciples expressed a natural astonishment at hearing their Master propose to return so soon into Judæa: but they forgot that he had a set time for a set work, and that whoever labours in the season of Divine appointment, is as one who takes advantage of the light, and has nothing to fear. The hour of darkness was coming, but not yet; and to re-awaken Lazarus was a part of the work which still remained for this gracious being to perform. In the language of nature and the world, Lazarus was dead: but in that of Jesus, he was but asleep. This is a distinction which must always prevail, as long as the many look merely at the body, and the few only contemplate the soul as the real seat of life. Our Lord might not have been understood, had he not condescended to the apprehensions of his disciples, and used their language. But though Lazarus

was dead as to the body, yet taking the whole man, and considering the immeasurably superior nature of the soul, the word which most correctly described the state of the latter, was strictly the best chosen; and our Lord more absolutely described the fact when he said, in his own way, "our friend Lazarus sleepeth," than when, accommodating himself to his disciples, he said "Lazarus is dead."

VERSES 15—19.

Had Jesus been present when Lazarus first fell sick, his power and friendship could only have been exercised in some unimportant miracle of healing. This would have created little notice, and added nothing to the faith of his disciples. Very different was the event which now awaited them. Thomas had more affection than faith. He spoke as a man who loved Jesus, but who could not hope to see him accomplish the wonderful purposes for which others believed him to be sent. That he was to fall a sacrifice to his enemies, he readily credited; but he could look no further, and he was prepared with a humble, melancholy spirit, to share his Master's fate. Lazarus and his sisters were evidently well known people. The death of an ordinary villager could hardly have drawn so many of the Jews to Bethany. A friendly, hospitable, noble nature, had rendered this little family equally conspicuous and respectable. Traces of high mental endowment; a generous temper, and social kindness, may readily be discovered in the circumstances recorded of these friends of Jesus. The death of Lazarus, therefore, was an event likely to create attention; and to subject the miracle of Jesus to corresponding enquiry.

VERSES 20—27.

The quick, active spirit of Martha is here strikingly contrasted with that of Mary, so silent and motionless in her

grief. But they had both drunk at the same fountain of Divine truth, and Martha's convictions of the power of Jesus, though not, perhaps, so profound or so beautiful as those of Mary, were as strong and acute. Her assurance that the presence of Jesus would have saved her brother; and the yet higher faith, that he might now accomplish a wonder which she must not ask, prove with what an earnest soul she had imbibed his lessons, and how far she had left behind all doubts of his Messiahship, or Divinity. "Thy brother shall rise again," was the answer which rewarded her profession. But she dare not receive it in its plainest meaning. Whatever had been taught her respecting a resurrection, whether gathered from Scripture, or from the traditions of her people, the fact that there would be a resurrection had become more and more familiar to her mind since she had learnt it from Jesus. It was natural that he should now repeat this truth, when, of all others, it was the best calculated to support and comfort her. But without venturing to confess it, she secretly felt that he meant to inspire the hope of a more immediate exercise of his power, than that which was eventually to be looked for. "I am the resurrection and the life," announced to her a present mastery over death. It connected the triumph with the simple will of Jesus; and brought all within the range of its revivifying grace, who confessed its power. There is a belief possible to the dead. That is, when God by his Word, and the first act of his Spirit, awakens the sinner to repentance, and the poor penitent cries in the agony of his soul, "What shall I do to be saved?" that grief has not, of itself, power to set him free from sin and its curse. He is still in a state of death. But then, if he be made acquainted with Jesus, and if he thankfully embrace him by faith, he is both pardoned and freed, and his whole inward being is restored to life. It is grace which accomplishes all this: grace which brings the dead soul to Jesus:

grace which enables it to see, to apprehend, to believe in him, as the life, and thus to find the Redeemer, at the very beginning of its course, the greatest and most practical of all benefactors, the friend, the restorer, the resurrection of the soul. Another meaning may be assigned to our Lord's words. He may be supposed to have intended, by the dead here spoken of, those who, having believed, shall not lose the advantage of their faith, however long they may lie in the grave. But, though this is a most certain truth, his present words seem to imply more than such a reference to the general resurrection. Belief cements the union between Christ and the soul. But belief is proper only to our existence here; and the life which we derive from him, and enjoy in him, through faith, must, therefore, be a life attained to in this world, and prior to the resurrection of the last day. "He that believeth in me shall never die," expressly attributes a life-sustaining power to faith. And the power which sustains is, in its earlier action, the power which revives; its influence being exercised, in both cases, on the soul as at present existing. Faith, hereafter, will have no place for operation. It is not faith which will raise the dead at the last day: it is not faith which will then form the link between Christ and his people. And when he speaks, therefore, as in the present case, of belief conferring life, we may receive his words as assuring us of a present passage from death unto life; of a victory accorded to faith which, though it leaves much to hope for in the way of glory, leaves nothing to dread as to the essential safety of our being. Martha did not give a direct reply to the question of our Lord; but by confessing him to be the Christ, and the Son of God, she acknowledged the truth of whatever he might reveal.

VERSES 28—42.

Martha was now replenished with thoughts and hopes of the most exciting nature. She obeyed their quickening impulse; and it is worthy of observation, that the same blessed, happy feeling which inspired her with confidence in Jesus, "I believe thou art the Christ;" sent her to her sister. Let the working of Divine grace be, indeed, carefully studied, and it will be found to unite the human heart strictly to God, on the one side, and to man, renewed and purified, on the other. Mary had the same feeling which Martha expressed. Jesus had come too late. Had he been present when Lazarus fell sick he would have restored him. But there was an overwhelming amount of argument against the hope of his rising from the grave. Even the spirituality of Mary's thoughts was opposed to such an idea ; and while her contemplative disposition tended to carry her mind far beyond the present, the view of the grave, the sight of her weeping sister, and their numerous friends, brought her feelings back to the earth, and oppressed her with an insupportable grief. Jesus himself bowed to the force of natural sorrow. He did not shed seeming tears for an imaginary distress. He wept real tears for a real grief. His friend Lazarus had suffered the terrors of death ; and those who bemoaned him were now exhibiting the most poignant anguish. And this was but one little chapter in the vast history of human suffering. Jesus knew what he intended to do in behalf of these particular sufferers. But he could see what countless multitudes of sorrowing, broken hearts, must remain unrelieved ; and if he shed some tears for those about whom he was immediately concerned, he, doubtless, though in secret, shed more for the unnamed and unnoticed sufferers known only to himself. The remark made by the Jews, " Could he not have saved Lazarus, if he loved him so well,

and could open the eyes of the blind?" was fair and just. But Jesus answered it in the best possible way. He had resolved to save his friend, not from sickness merely, but from death. Martha trembled with natural dread when she beheld the test to which Jesus was about to put his power. It was not of her brother only now that she thought. The honour of her Master, of her great friend and teacher, was at stake. Lazarus had been four days in the grave. Corruption had done its work ; and love, faith, and hope, equally shrunk from the idea that aught could be done to repair the ruin. The look and words which Jesus directed to Heaven, were in acknowledgment of his Father's power, as lord of life. His homage was answered with ineffable outpourings of love ; and Jesus rejoiced in the testimony borne him, because he knew how many souls would be saved and comforted, in all ages to come, by these events.

VERSES 43—47.

The only medium employed by Jesus when he exercised his power to raise Lazarus was the word which he uttered, " Lazarus, come forth." That word was heard by the dead, and it accomplished its purpose. The buried man arose. He came forth. Corruption had utterly loosened its hold ; and death left no trace of its presence, except the trammels and the symbols which human fancy had supplied. Of all the means and channels, therefore, of Divine grace, the word spoken, the word of God and of Jesus, is to be regarded as the most effectual. It is "the Word" which regenerates ; it is the word which quickens : it is at the word, that the dead arise. Lazarus lived again, because he who is the resurrection and the life, willed that he should so return to life ; but the immediate instrument of his restoration was the word of Jesus. And that same word has still the same power ; and whenever it reaches the soul, penetrating it with the summons

"Awake, thou that sleepest;" it produces an analogous effect: and the dead soul arises. The re-appearance of Lazarus produced its natural effect upon the greater number of the spectators. They could not resist such evidence to the truth of Jesus. But no amount of proof will avail in certain states of mind; and we accordingly find that some who beheld the miracle instead of worshipping Jesus hastened, in a spirit of dogged bewilderment, to tell the Pharisees.

VERSES 47—57.

The miracle which Jesus had thus wrought, was more calculated than any which preceded it to excite the alarm of his enemies. No doubt could be entertained of its reality; and the persons whom it most deeply interested were thoughtful and devoted people, not likely to be readily diverted from proclaiming what they believed to be the truth. The pretended fear of the Romans was only a cloak for malice. Jesus had no political character, and his followers were singularly free from any appearance of turbulence or sedition. But this was the only charge which the most subtle invention could contrive; and Caiaphas threw a veil over the iniquity of the plot thus invented, by suggesting the idea of a sacrifice, according to which, though Jesus might, in one respect, die by an unjust sentence, his death might be justified, as endured for the necessities of the nation. This was the reasoning of Caiaphas, obeying as he, and his hearers supposed, the dictates of his own understanding, but uttering a profound and awful truth, the meaning of which he was only to discover when it would involve him in unutterable despair. Jesus had both an eye and an ear open to all these proceedings, and till his hour was come would let none take effect. Ephraim is supposed to have been the same as the ancient Ephron;

about twenty miles from Jerusalem. The enquiries, which the early attendants at the preparations for the Passover made, indicate very strongly how important a place the name of Jesus now occupied in the minds of the people.

CHAPTER XII.

VERSES 1—8.

Every step in our Lord's progress is marked with grace and sublimity. He retires into the wilderness to avoid, for the present, the dangers which beset him in Jerusalem, and to instruct patient hearers of his Gospel more fully in its doctrines. But before the Passover, he returns with tranquil dignity to the neighbourhood of the city ; and begins the great week of suffering with a feast, sitting down in the midst of his loving friends, and rejoicing to partake of their hospitality, as an emblem of their earnest and abiding union. The costly act of Mary had a meaning and intention which gave it a dignity far beyond the apprehension of the guests. To her exalted mind, Jesus already appeared invested with the highest attributes of sovereignty, and when she anointed him with the odorous spikenard, she did but express the homage which her soul rendered him as the mightiest and holiest of beings. Jesus accepted the homage, but he gave it a significance dimly, perhaps, mingling with Mary's first intention, and now rendering the service one of profound beauty and solemnity. The lowering looks of Judas had never a baser expression than when contrasted, as they were now, with the beaming devotion of Mary, and those who shared her feelings.

VERSES 9—11.

The presence of Lazarus at this supper gave confirmation to whatever Jesus had asserted of himself as the lord of life.

It was fitting that such an evidence of his power should be displayed on this occasion. Those who doubted or rejected him, with Lazarus before them, afforded a lasting proof, that it is not want of evidence, but want of will which keeps men opposed to Christ. His disciples, on the contrary, could not behold Lazarus without gathering strength for all their coming trials. It was no vision which they saw. The dead man lived again as they lived; unless, indeed, as they might reasonably believe, he now enjoyed a new principle of life, imparted to him when he rose, and which would prepare him, without a second death, for the speedy following of his Lord. Great obscurity hangs over the further history of Lazarus. Tradition says nothing which can be depended upon: and it seems more accordant with the working of that power and love which raised Lazarus from the dead, to suppose that they, in due time, exalted him, as Enoch or Elijah was taken up, to his proper abode in Paradise, than to regard him as again suffering the sorrows of decay, the anguish of death, or perhaps the terrors of martyrdom. The saints which came out of their graves, at the resurrection of Jesus, did not surely return to the tomb. And there is no reason to question but that, at a moment, whatever further change was necessary to fit Lazarus for his higher abode, would be accomplished by the word of his triumphant Lord.

VERSES 12—19.

Natural admiration, mingling with some degree of religious awe, had rendered popular feeling, on the side of Jesus, too powerful for the control of either Scribes or Pharisees. The multitude could not remain insensible to his goodness, or blind to his miracles; and the season favoured the sudden outburst of emotions, which, in a time of less festivity, prudence or fear might have kept suppressed.

VERSES 20—26.

The Greeks here spoken of were Gentile converts. They had come up to the Passover with strong impressions of the great truths made known to them by their new religion. The one true God was now their God : they had a reasonable hope of immortality ; and the genuine principles of moral law had rectified the errors of their lives. To men thus lately emancipated from the wretched bondage of false religion, every fresh announcement of truth must have sounded graciously and pleasantly. The account of Jesus seems to have reached them from a legitimate source ; and they had the wisdom to seek further information from his own disciples. Philip saw the importance of satisfying enquirers of such a character ; but the reverence with which he regarded his Master, would not suffer him to introduce these strangers without cautious preparation. It is doubtful whether Jesus addressed the discourse which follows, to these persons as well as his disciples, or to the latter only. Probably, he spoke generally, and without regard to those who came or went. The hour of his triumph was approaching. Death was to put him in possession of his kingdom : it was to make him the new seed of the human race : from him, buried in the earth, was to spring a glorious harvest of immortal saints. Eternal in his Divine nature : boundless in power ; infinite in perfection, he yet could not, without dying, have imparted to his people the salvation of which he has thus become the author. He must, in that respect, have remained alone. It is by dying he has overcome death for us ; by his resurrection that he has acquired that glorious property of his character as Redeemer, by which he can diffuse life through every soul which he justifies. And this sublime and generous sacrifice of himself for the salvation of the world, is to be contemplated by his people as the great illustration of an unqualified sub-

mission to the will of God. Jesus died in obedience to the decree of his Father. Whenever the interests of truth and holiness demand such a sacrifice on the part of his disciples, to save life by refusing the sacrifice would be to lose it for eternity ; whereas, to resign it gladly, would be to follow the example of Jesus himself, and to attain to a share in the glory which he inherits. This is his important lesson. The temper, the mind, the spirit of Christ, constitutes a Christian. In the conduct of Christ, he has his plan of life. What his Master did, he must be prepared in will to do. This is, to follow Christ : and the result will be consecutive realizations of the Divine promises. Grace will succeed to grace : peace will deepen in the heart : and, in due time, there will be glory.

VERSES 27—36.

If Jesus could not have felt trouble and anguish, his bearing our sorrows, or being wounded for our transgressions, would have been but in name. Being so constituted as to experience pain, when there was aught to inflict it, it was true, natural feeling, which gave utterance to the expression here recorded. Could Jesus have effected his benign purpose, or fulfilled his Father's will, without suffering, well might he have rejoiced to escape the gathering terrors of the hour that was coming upon him. Nor was it inconsistent with entire submission to the decree which consigned him to the cross, that he should desire to lessen the intermediate distresses of the trial. Though it was absolutely necessary that he should die, it was not in the same sense necessary that he should endure insult, or stand exposed to the torture and agony inflicted by human hate, not by the judicial wrath of God. "Save me from this hour" may, therefore, be regarded, in one respect, as expressive of the natural desire of the human will to avoid suffering : and, in another, as referring to the cloud of incidental miseries which might possibly have been spared the

victim, without diminishing the value of his atonement. But the whole is represented as only a passing emotion. The will resigned itself, without limitation, to the Divine rule. "Glorify thy name :" expressed the returning strength and joy of the soul : and the voice of God confirmed the hope of the disciples, as they read a promise of approaching glory in the countenance of their now rejoicing Master. He knew that sentence was being passed on the powers of this fallen world. For the season, they were to enjoy an apparent triumph against holiness and truth ; but their strength was then to be finally broken, and the crucified Redeemer was to prove himself endowed with a might greater than that of all the kings of the earth. It can hardly be supposed that the Jews did not find much to startle them in our Lord's words. They had a peculiar signification as connected with the opposite ideas of suffering and glory. He spoke of himself as Messiah ; but alluded, though darkly, yet very intelligibly, to his dying upon the cross. Their question, "How sayest thou ?" was the enquiry, not so much of disbelieving, as of perplexed minds. They had yet the means of knowledge. Jesus was himself ready, while still with them, to resolve their doubts. When he departed, they had, for a further season, the extraordinary helps of Apostolic teaching. Happy they who walked while they had the light ! The darkness was soon to involve them in hopeless gloom. To believe in the light, is to become children of light.

VERSES 37—43.

The general conduct of the Jews, in their opposition to Jesus, was as irrational as it was base. Both his miracles, and the character of his doctrines, claimed a treatment the very reverse of that which he received ; and when he was rejected, the sin of his enemies might be referred directly to their own maliciousness of nature, in which, no doubt, it

had its proper origin; or, indirectly, to the yet deeper wickedness of soul which followed the withdrawal of all Divine grace and light, the consequence and the punishment of the contempt with which Jesus had been treated. It is the latter view which Isaiah takes, and according to which he frames his language. He saw the Lord punishing the Jews by ceasing to give them light; and by hardening instead of converting them. At this stage, it might be said, "they could not believe;" but they only arrived at this stage by their own perverse and daring conduct; and by sins which would have only continued to multiply the longer they had been spared. The conflict between light and darkness was now, therefore, to end. It was no longer to be allowed to these wretched blasphemers to say, "We might be converted, but we will not." The mercy of the Lord had borne with them, till they had passed through every trial of moral nature. It had failed; and when mercy could do no more, it was to give way to wrath. Hence the blinding and the hardening; so that the expressions of the prophet might be literally true, and yet no contradiction to the free offer of pardon and peace which had so repeatedly been published. The force of conviction did, in some cases, overcome every species of opposition but one. A keen sense of worldly respectability put the last stumbling-block in the way of the chief rulers here described. They believed in Jesus, but not unto salvation, and they only stopped short of this high mark of their calling, because they could not see the grossness of their inconsistency in weighing a present honour or interest against the promises of God.

VERSES 44—50.

A full and complete belief in Jesus necessarily passes on from him to the Father, so that it stops not in Jesus, but leads the soul through him to embrace and rejoice in the

eternal Godhead. The belief in Jesus would have been a contradiction had it gone no further, it being his own especial doctrine, that he came to reveal his Father; and hence, "He that seeth me, seeth him that sent me." In another respect, this is also true. Strictly considered, we believe on Jesus only because his Father has borne witness to him: we do not believe on the Father because of the witness of the Son. We should not have known the Father but by the revelation of the Son; but this is not testimony in the same sense as the witness which the Father bears to the Son; and the belief, therefore, is not in the latter but the former, in whom the whole series of revelations begins, and to whom it returns. Even in respect to judgment, our Lord systematically referred the guilt of the blasphemer to his pure, unchanging word. He had come to dispense a rule of equal holiness and mercy; and it was the rejection of that rule, and not the opposition to Jesus personally, which constituted the sin unto death.

CHAPTER XIII.

VERSES 1—10.

Profoundly expressive of the Saviour's love as are the incidents here described, their meaning becomes vastly heightened from the character of continuance given them. These last acts of Jesus were but such in Spirit and intention as he had ever been performing towards his disciples. He loved them from the beginning; and, as he loved them unto the end, so he shewed especially by his present acts of condescension, of thoughtful, tender solicitude, how his love towards them left nothing unsuggested which might tend to their personal good, or to the success of their labours. Though it was now for the first time that he washed their feet, it was not now that he began to exercise towards them the love which led to that act of equal communion. He was

only loving them as at the first, but he now taught them how sublime, how free from all worldly littlenesses, how utterly opposed to pride and selfishness was that love with which he was actuated, and which it was his object to see implanted, and living among his people. No greater contrast of circumstances was ever exhibited, than that displayed in the present chapter of his own history. Assuming the garb, he performed the humblest offices, of a servant; and this he did, at the very period when he knew that his Father had given all things into his hands, and when he was on the point of entering into glory. Here was the lowliest spirit inheriting boundless dominion; and rejoicing equally in the exercise of its meekness, and its power. The most loving friendship could not have performed, in that Eastern land, an act of more graceful kindness than this of Jesus. When he washed his disciples' feet, he consecrated their friendly intercourse for ever after, and with it all the common rites of hospitality. He taught them also the combined worth of brotherly kindness, humility, and purity, a lesson the full meaning of which they were not yet able to comprehend, but which, as they grew in spirituality, would shine forth to them, more and more clearly, as exhibiting the mind of Jesus. When Peter regarded the act in itself only, he refused to be honoured at the expense of his Master's humiliation. But with the first glimpse which he caught of our Lord's figurative meaning, he passed to the other extreme, and desired the symbol in excess. He had shrunk from being served by his Lord; but when he discovered that this service, rendered by supreme benevolence, was purifying and renovating, he could not rest contented with what seemed to him a partial enjoyment of the blessing. And had the gift of grace depended upon the method of washing, Peter's desire would have been wisely expressed. But our Lord meant only to exhibit an example of humility and love, and to intimate how he purifies by his

Spirit, where he is received and obeyed as a Master. The man whose feet are washed by Jesus with this spiritual intention, is clean every whit, that purifying stream of life which washes his feet cleansing his whole being.

VERSES 11—17.

The simple and ready acceptance of the grace proffered by their Master, was the only sign which the disciples had to afford of their accordance with his will. They were washed, sanctified, by the cleansing influence of his Spirit. All but one became clean through this renovating process. In his case, neither the token nor the grace availed. He remained unclean, because he wilfully rejected Jesus. The further safety of the other disciples was to be proved by a steady obedience to their Master's example.

VERSES 18—30.

It was our Lord's express intention to forewarn his disciples of all the great classes of events by which their faith or fortitude might be tried. The treachery of one of their own number would have tended greatly to shake their confidence in the government of the church had it not been foreseen and foretold. Thus contemplated, it might be readily regarded as compelled by Divine power and wisdom to enter into the plan of salvation, and as being permitted only because it could be so harmonized with the general purpose of good and mercy. And thus with every occurrence in which the malice of Satan, or the wickedness of man, prevailed for a time. It had been foreseen; and when recognised in the series of events as exactly answering to the lines in the prophetic chart, the author of the prophecy is acknowledged to have spoken either with Divine wisdom, or by Divine authority. That our Lord was betrayed, delivered to the Gentiles, and crucified, would have appeared in a different

light, had he foretold that so it would be. When it came to pass in exact conformity with his own prediction, who could doubt but that he was all which he proclaimed himself to be? The certainty that the grandest of triumphs was to follow this season of distress, still left room for natural sorrow. Jesus could not behold his reprobate disciple, unmoved; and when he beheld the last spark of Divine light extinguished in his conscience, and Satan, immediately after, taking entire possession of his soul, he spoke the language of one who felt anxious to hasten to its end a work which required so gloomy and hideous an agent. "What thou doest, do quickly." "He went out; and it was night!"

VERSES 31—38.

The glory of Heaven dawned upon Jesus at his baptism; but now that he had surrendered himself, in the perfection of his obedience, as a sacrifice to his Father's decree, the presence of the Godhead possessed his whole being. The consent of his will to the last act in the series of supernatural circumstances here described, was immediately followed by the sense of glory. As the sacrifice was virtually perfected, the reward was apprehended; and this was the support and sustenance of the soul of Jesus through all his agony. But in the midst of his ecstatic contemplation of the future, the mind of Jesus was still engaged about his disciples. It was the object of his mercy to make them partakers of the glory into which, mentally, he was already entering. The principle most nearly connected with that which thus exalted him was brotherly love; and if they were ever to follow him, it must be when they had perfected it by passing through all the various duties and trials which constitute, by turns, the subjection, and the sacrifice of self. That Peter was not yet fitted to follow Jesus, is not so apparent from his momentary terror, as from his general temper. No two states of mind

could be more opposite than that of the servant drawing his sword, and that of the Master meekly preparing himself for the cross. Jesus and Peter could not have passed together, at that moment, into the same region of glory.

CHAPTER XIV.

VERSES 1—7.

It is not so much of belief in the existence of God, as of faith in his fatherly goodness, that our Lord here speaks to his disciples. Their belief in God was sufficient to uphold them in the common path of duty; to encourage them in the hope of a future life; and by its healthful influence on their souls, it had raised them above the baser passions and prejudices of their age. But, both for their religion, and their happiness, it was necessary that they should believe in Jesus with the same extent and particularity of faith with which they acknowledged the providence and government of God. Their hearts were troubled with apprehensions which could not be removed, while their faith was confined to the teaching of the Old Testament. When our Lord told them to believe in him, he spoke, as in regard to God, not of a general belief in him, as true, but of trust in all the blessed and comforting doctrines which he was about to reveal, and by the unreserved acceptance of which they would effectually triumph over the fears, as well as the corruption, of their hearts. The saddest of feelings are often found associated with indefinite prospects of a future state. Immortality will not, of itself, satisfy us; and hence the first lesson which our Lord taught his disciples on this subject, brings before them a distinct and visible habitation. It is no longer in that of mere existence; of a higher spiritual condition, that the idea of heaven consists. God, in whom we believe, has given us the promise of eternal life, distinctly and individually. And now the Son of God, in

whom He also desires us to believe, has made known to us, that there are mansions prepared for us, in which that eternal life is to be passed in certain, palpable enjoyments of place and circumstances, so that the future, and eternity, all which lies beyond the present and the visible, instead of remaining vague and uncertain, may become as appreciable to our hopes, as the simplest of the objects which now engage our affections and desires. "Ye believe in God :" that was the broad and deep foundation of all knowledge, and of all hope. Proceed in the same line of heavenly instruction. "Believe in me :" and then the general knowledge of a future existence descends to the particulars : and he who, trusting to the goodness of his God, believed that he should live for ever, now, trusting to the word, and the human sympathies, of the Son of God, believes that nothing whatsoever shall be wanting to the complete satisfaction of his whole nature, in all its complication of faculties and wishes. Our Lord speaks of two distinct acts performed by himself. First, he prepares the habitation for his people ; and then he comes to receive them unto himself. Each of these acts ought to excite in us a corresponding sentiment of joyful devotion. Jesus is even now engaged in furnishing the radiant plains of Heaven with abodes for us, his worshippers. While he is thus employed for us, can we be idle in his cause ? He will, in due time, come to take us back with him to that happy home. Shall we be negligent in preparing ourselves for such an entrance into perfect and eternal blessedness ? The home which he, himself, has, is to be our home. What can be a stronger practical argument to persuade us to become like him ? It is a singular, and apparently inexplicable, difficulty of expression, which we meet with in this passage. Our Lord himself goes "a way," while he says that he, himself, is "the way." And this becomes intelligible only by considering that as he, himself, is "life," and "truth," so he can impart it to others ; and that

as he is "the way," connecting, that is, human sense with heavenly glory, so he can exalt his people to the enjoyment of glories like his own, by uniting them with himself. The knowledge of the Son, who is the perfect image of the Father, is the knowledge of the Godhead, as far as it is possible for the human mind to comprehend it. If we know Jesus, we know the Father, that being a true and perfect knowledge of God, which is according to his own method and measure of revelation. In old times, it was only by word or symbol. But now it is personally, by the Son, and, as such, by all those qualities of Divine being which we may best appreciate by heart and understanding.

VERSES 8—14.

Philip's earnestness was the fruit of a deep conviction, that it required but little more exertion of his self-revealing power, on the part of Jesus, to make the glory of the Godhead visible. Our Lord's answer plainly proved, that it is an essential end of his dispensation to make the Father known by the Son. Thus, the true believer in Christ, receives it, as a part of his faith, that God is really known to him in so far as he knows and apprehends Jesus, his Gospel and its doctrines. Nor can there be a grander principle in any system, even of Divine religion, than this, that by faith in the Son of God, the qualities of whose nature and character are perfectly intelligible, we may be brought to comprehend the perfections of God himself. Such is the union of the Father with the Son; such the sameness of their nature, that where the one is known, the other must be known also: but it is of infinite consequence to creatures like ourselves to learn, through what medium, or by what steps, we are to approach the Almighty. And when it is plainly revealed, that the Son of God has become incarnate; that through him, thus become man, we may know God, nothing surely ought to engage our attention more than the

study of that man, his character, word, and actions, through whom the eternal Father is thus revealed to our apprehensions. But faith is here represented, not only as endowing the soul with the highest conceivable kind of knowledge, but as also enriching it with powers or privileges surpassing the noblest of human attainments. Belief in Jesus places him, in whom that faith operates, on the same working-stage with Jesus himself; and while it thus fits him for any work of God, it gives him an acknowledged claim to his paternal bounty; and to a share in the efficacious intercessions of Jesus, joining his prayers to those of the disciple.

VERSES 15—21.

Love and obedience are conditions easily understood, however difficult of fulfilment. But in this case they are claimed by the best and strongest reasons; and the grandest of all consequences is to follow them. The Son of God has a right to our love founded on the surest title of nature and gratitude; and love like that which he can claim is denied, if not followed by conformity of will and disposition. When these things meet in our relation to Jesus, we then become partakers of the promised Comforter. The place of the Master, absent as to his visible presence, is supplied by the Divine Being, who can be present in his whole nature and power, because he is wholly spiritual. The world cannot receive him, because of its blindness to his perfections and proper character. Disciples of Jesus were wrought upon by his grace, and became conscious of his visitations from the dawn of their new existence; but it was not till the sealing of the covenant that the blessed Spirit entered into the body of the church purchased with the blood of Christ; nor is it, individually, that he becomes a comforter to believers till they have learnt to desire his presence, opening their hearts to his sanctifying grace. When he has wrought the full work of conversion, then it is that

Jesus, himself, appears present to the soul, and accomplishes his promise, "I will come to you," the indwelling of his Spirit being his own presence in its truest and most essential character; and the increasing illumination which follows increasing obedience, being that manifestation of himself which he promises to those who keep his commandments.

VERSES 22—31.

It ought to be especially observed, that in this all-important discourse, our Lord insists, with emphatic force, on a perfect submission to his words. Love with him is nothing, if wanting in obedience. This being fulfilled, blessing follows upon blessing; grace upon grace; the Spirit prepares the believer for union with the Father and the Son; doctrine after doctrine is revealed, and peace, the crowning gift of Jesus, possesses and fills the heart. Had the love of the disciples been as pure and elevated as it might have been, but for the narrowness of their understanding, they would, doubtless, have rejoiced at the prospect of their Master's departure. As to his humanity, his Father was greater than he, properly and essentially: and as the Father, by way of relation, though not in nature and essence, He was greater than he. But, in now speaking to his disciples, he only intended to fix their thoughts upon the necessary method of his attaining to that kingdom which he was to enjoy as mediator. His departure to his Father was, in that respect, an ascent to glory, and viewed naturally, therefore, should have been contemplated with joy. He had now nearly fulfilled his ministry, and had little more to reveal; the complete communication of the system of grace being referred to the teaching of the Spirit. The prince of this world had nothing in him, no relation to him, no claim upon him; and "the coming of the prince of this world," was the same as "the hour of darkness." Each describes the termination of the season of grace,

extended through our Lord's personal ministry. When Satan drew near to fulfil the design permitted him, Jesus had then no more to say or to do, but what might be needed to prove his entire subjection to his Father's decree.

CHAPTER XV.

VERSES 1—8.

This discourse was probably not delivered in immediate connection with that reported in the preceding chapter. It is not, however, necessary to suppose that more than a slight interval intervened, or time enough to enable Jesus and his followers to find a more secure retreat, till he could finish his wise and affectionate counsels. As the vine, the true vine, he was full of precious life, and precious fruit. He had been planted, was reared by, and still owned, the nursing hand of his Father as the husbandman. His disciples were the branches which the life within him caused him to put forth. They imbibed their proper share of that life, and it was as fitting that they should bear fruit, as that he should put forth branches. No husbandman will long leave branches on a tree which prove themselves fruitless; nor will a good husbandman fail to cultivate the promise of a richer harvest, which he may discover in branches which have already profited by the pruning. The beautiful and cheering image which our Lord thus employs is peculiarly striking. His true people, deriving spiritual life from him, are as essentially united with him as the branches with the vine; and noble deeds, generous, wise, and holy sentiments; pure, devout prayers, and all the shining, earnest virtues of charity, are just as proper and natural to the soul living on Christ, as blossoms and rich clustering fruit to the vigorous vine. The one is as much a proper produce as the other; and the vine and the husbandman are certainly no more to be regarded

as failing of their purpose when no grapes are seen, than is Christ, or his Father, when the believer in the Gospel is unfruitful in good works.

VERSES 9—16.

By telling his disciples that his love to them is like the love of his Father to himself, Jesus institutes the highest of all claims to their affection and obedience. That he laid down his life for his people, was the greatest proof which he could give of love for them while they were still sinners; poor, corrupt, and miserable. His love for them, viewed under this aspect, was unfathomably profound; and there is no gratitude, of which we are capable, intense enough to answer it: but when he compares his love for them to his Father's love for himself, he shews it not as the tenderness which impelled him to be their Saviour, but as the bright, glorious, and living principle, which brings them into perfect harmony and union with him; a view of Divine love which carries our thoughts far beyond all which it has done for us in the act of the salvation; salvation itself, strictly considered, only placing sinner in a position of freedom, but grace endowing him with qualities, which render him capable of enjoying the love of Christ, by reciprocal communion. Had he not first loved us, and exercised his love in that most wonderful of all acts, his humiliation and death, we could never have loved either him or his Father. But now being reconciled to God, his will is properly the rule of our existence: we keep his commandments as the law essential to all good. Jesus, though our Master, is our nearest and dearest friend, by a communication of spirit. He chose us; we did not choose him. This is the foundation of our security, as well as the great argument by which he shews his right to our gratitude. Had we made the first movement towards him, it might have been thought that he was, at least, indebted to us for our homage

and respect. But we had neither the virtue nor the wisdom to elect him as our Lord ; or to look for him as a Saviour. He began by loving us. His love was, at first, but mercy. When it had done, or rather when it shall have done, all that is needed to redeem, convert, sanctify the perishing sinner, then it will burst more freely and resplendently forth ; and the love of Jesus having saved the sinner will glorify the man, and his love to the child of God will be as God's love to him, unstinted by any defect in its object, or by any circumstance in its action. It is on this principle, that the believer may be assured of receiving of the Father whatsoever he shall ask in the name of Jesus.

VERSES 17—20.

It is worthy of especial notice, that our Lord prefaches his warning of the troubles and persecutions which believers may expect in the world, by earnestly exhorting them to mutual love. In most cases, the members of a party, which stands in opposition to a large and powerful enemy, feel an affection for each other in proportion to their common danger. The history of political movements and revolutions abounds in instances of this kind. In the primitive times of the Gospel, the precept of our Lord was also nobly illustrated. " See how these Christians love one another," was the frequent exclamation of the heathen. And such will always be the case when the Church retains its proper and distinctive spiritual character ; when its teaching, and the lives of its members, are thoroughly embued with the Divine Spirit, and aim directly and unflinchingly at the glory of God. With these tendencies, it cannot but be in opposition to the world, and the world will resist, and persecute it, according to the character of the age. In periods, and countries, where civil liberty is unknown, magistrates may pursue the believer with sword and flame. Under other circumstances, and when laws are equal

and supreme, the world will take another course, persecuting those who really love the Lord Jesus, with mean and cruel arts, and subjecting them, in their homes, or personal interests, to numberless annoyances, which it requires equal wisdom to resist, and fortitude to bear. But, in all cases, the love of Christians for each other is necessary to their sustaining, happily, the common hostility of the world. The deep and earnest friendship, which a faith like theirs inspires, is rich in so many noble associations, that, wherever it exists, there is an effectual shield against vulgar scorn and malice.

VERSES 21—27.

Ignorance of God is the fruit of sin; and the soul of man cannot become acquainted again with God, except by Divine grace. Jesus attributes his rejection by the Jews to their ignorance of his Father. This was a case of peculiar guilt, because they had received grace in such large measures, that they might have fully understood the Divine purposes in respect to Christ. The wonderful works which he wrought among them, left their unbelief without a shadow of excuse. Their first error, their common doubts, would have been pardoned. They knew not God, because their minds were darkened by the general influence of corruption. But Christ had offered them light: he had withdrawn the cloud which hid his Father from their view. They had seen him, but they refused to know him; and, instead of loving, they hated him. The Holy Spirit was soon to come, and bear even still stronger testimony to the truth of Jesus; and that nothing might be wanting to confirm the faith of believers, or to leave the world without excuse, human testimony was to be added to the divine, and men were to learn from the lips of their fellow-men what God had done by Christ.

CHAPTER XVI.

VERSES 1—6.

A lesson of the most important kind is here taught by our Lord. It does not merely shew, that, being forewarned, the disciples were to bear patiently the persecution of their enemies ; but that, as a general principle, the knowledge of the distinction between the world and the people of God, should prevent the latter from feeling, as a grievance, the vexations encountered through faithful obedience to the Gospel. That which is according to the very nature of things, ought to offend no one. He, who should voluntarily go to the North Pole, after having been thoroughly instructed as to the nature of the region, would be worthy of no sympathy, if he complained, when he reached his destiny, of the rigour of the climate. And so he, who has been told beforehand, that a disciple of Christ is crucified unto the world ; is separate from, and antagonist to, the world, and when he has become a Christian, complains that the world does not love him, but rather resists his views, and scorns his pretensions, is guilty of extreme folly, and has no claim to pity. Jesus, his Master, has spoken to him in the plainest language of warning and caution, that he should not be offended. But in this case, as in all others, he explains how the hostility between his people and the world arises. Mankind, in their fallen and corrupt state, know neither the Father nor the Son, and hence their hatred to those whose lives are uniformly regulated by the Divine law. It seems strange that our Lord should have accused his disciples of not asking him, “Whither goest thou?” when Peter had shortly before put this question directly to him. (Chap. xiii. 36.) But the present conversation may have been more peculiarly fitted to justify such an enquiry : or the remark may have been addressed to a

larger circle of hearers; or, more probably, it may have referred, not so much to their want of interest in regard to his departure, as to their earthliness of feeling, which prevented them from rejoicing at his approaching triumph, so that his meaning would be, "You are overwhelmed with sorrow because I speak of leaving you: you are likely to be so; for none of you consider the glory to which I am going: none of you ask me respecting the splendour of the sphere which I am henceforth to inhabit: you cannot look beyond the present affliction."

VERSES 7—11.

The consideration of their Master's victory over sin and death, and the triumph which he would enjoy in his own person, ought to have been sufficient in itself to satisfy the disciples that it was good for him to depart. But he now impresses upon them another reason, and one derived from the view of their own interests, why they should look tranquilly and hopefully to the season of his removal. He did not explain how it was that, unless he went away, the Comforter would not come; but we now know that redemption by his death and resurrection was a necessary preparation, an indispensable condition, to the return of the Holy Spirit to the human soul; to regeneration, sanctification, and each successive work by which man, being pardoned and justified, may be fitted for glory. The end of his coming, in respect to God's people, was this their sanctification; but in regard to the world, he had another object, described here under a threefold character. Thus, he convicts, or shews it to be guilty, of sin, because it refuses to believe in Jesus. This work of accusing argument it effects by proving, that it is simply the corruption of the heart; the voluntary repugnance of a sensual and evil nature to truth, which makes men disbelievers in Christ. It is not meant that the world itself is

savinely convinced by the accusation of the Holy Spirit ; but that he demonstrates to all who accept his teaching, that the disbelief of mankind is both a gross and heavy crime, and the consequence of a debased nature. So again, it is part of the work of this great teacher to convict the world concerning righteousness ; that is, to prove by the ascension of Jesus to his Father, that perfect righteousness was displayed in his conduct and character ; that he fulfilled all righteousness by his obedience and sufferings ; and that God has borne witness to his love of such a righteousness by receiving Jesus to himself. For when the Holy Spirit shews, whether to the thankful believer, or to the terror-stricken blasphemer, that Christ has indeed gone into Heaven, there to wait till his enemies be made his footstool, he gives the grandest of all demonstrations to the reality and power of righteousness, because he proves that in the instance of its most perfect display, as in the case of Jesus, it received of God its most glorious reward. And, lastly, he convicts the world of judgment, proving, that is, against all its boastings, pretensions and excuses, its universal guilt ; setting aside every claim to pardon ; and sealing its sentence of final destruction in that of Satan its prince. This is a judgment which involves all the various sentences against sin ; and it is pre-eminently the work of the Holy Ghost to convince the hearts and consciences of men that such will be the end of iniquity. As in other cases, the knowledge of God's purposes, conveyed by this heavenly teacher to those who repent and believe, is accompanied with infinite consolation. The same knowledge fills the soul of the impenitent with extreme horror ; but it has a like origin. It is the demonstration of the Holy Ghost, making known a great truth, but only in its nakedness and severity.

VERSES 12—22.

The things already told the disciples were such as the wisest men of former times had desired to know, but had not been taught ; and yet, as our Lord said, many were the truths still to be revealed ; many the wonderful and sublime mysteries reserved for the future teaching of the spirit. To know the whole of the Gospel, therefore, we must first receive Christ himself by faith, and the blessed Spirit through him. Then we may look to understand the entire compass of Evangelical truth ; for the Holy Ghost, we are expressly told, will not confine his revelations to that which concerns his own personality ; he will not speak merely to our consciences of sin ; to our souls of the necessity of their regeneration ; but he will open to us the wide ranges of eternal truth ; he will make us understand the past ; he will lift the veil from the future. The words and actions of Jesus, as we look at them in themselves, are sufficient to make us know him as the Son of God, our dear Lord and Redeemer ; but the Holy Spirit brings from the infinite depth of light and life new and perpetual evidences of his glory ; enabling the soul of the believer to discover more and more clearly in him the perfections of the Godhead ; the attributes of a universal sovereignty ; the power of the Father ; with a perfect equality of possession throughout the entire realms of being. But from this lofty contemplation, the thoughts of his disciples were now to be led to a subject of painful interest. He was soon to leave them : they were to endure a trial which would force them to weep and lament. Whence the necessity, they naturally asked, of this affliction ? The only answer they received was, that it should be for a season only ; that their sorrow, not like that of the world, which is unchangeable in its nature, should be turned into joy.

VERSES 23—27.

Our Lord in speaking of “that day” refers to the period when, having died and risen again, he would have finished the work of redemption. Seated on his throne above, in the glory which he had with his Father before the world was, his disciples do not approach to inquire of him now, as his first disciples gathered about him, questioned him, and sought his aid while he was upon earth, and before his glorification. They were not in the position of men justified, reconciled to God, regenerate and sanctified by the Holy Ghost. It was not then their happy privilege to be able to approach the Father as his beloved and accepted children. But this was hereafter to be their state, as it is that of all who have wholly received Christ. For them still to have asked, or for believers generally now to ask any thing of the Saviour, as the disciples questioned him, or besought his help, while they knew him only in the flesh; or for us to look to him separately, and not through him to the Father, would be a contradiction of the Divine arrangement, according to which it is the name, and the mediation of Jesus, which afford us an effectual access to the Father; that free approach to him being the very fulfilment of salvation, and to stop short of which would be to lose the best part of the purchased possession. It is proper to be noted that the word “ask” in the original, is signified by two words. Thus, “Ye shall ask me nothing,” might be more strictly rendered “Ye shall not then interrogate me,” while in the next two instances, the word in the original corresponds exactly to our English “ask,” or “request.” So, in verse 26, “Ye shall ask,” is the literal translation; while “I will pray the Father,” has, in the original, for “pray,” the same word as that which more commonly signifies “enquire” or “interrogate;” but this word, as well as the other, is often used in the sense of “to ask.” Our translation,

therefore, may not be incorrect. By speaking in proverbs, our Lord meant, that he had employed parables, familiar sayings and comparisons, to communicate his instructions, and that he had hitherto only partially revealed the doctrines of the Gospel. Even now, his disciples were not prepared to receive more than a very small portion of heavenly truth. The time was at hand, when there should be no restriction in the gift of Divine knowledge. "I shall shew you plainly of the Father," and the enquiries or petitions addressed to the Father, in the name of Jesus, were to be answered by the Father himself, because of his own love to the redeemed.

VERSES 28—33.

In the statement, that he came from the Father and now returned to him, our Lord seemed to speak more plainly than hitherto. He did, indeed, announce a great truth, and in simple language. But the disciples did not fully apprehend him. They felt that he knew all things which had relation to the accomplishment of his design ; to the establishment of his kingdom ; and that, consequently, there was no necessity for his being any more questioned on this subject. Venerating him as they did, he had now said enough to convince them that he was come from God. But as yet they had no idea of redemption by his blood : their belief was not founded in the knowledge of that method of salvation which it was his purpose to establish. This was soon to be shewn by their terror in the hour of darkness. The mention of their weakness and want of faith might have been accompanied by a lesson of stern severity ; but, on the contrary, our Lord blended the warning with the tenderest and most consolatory suggestions. For himself, though deserted by his poor, trembling followers, he was still to enjoy the presence of his Father : and as for them, whatever their trials, they were soon to be convinced, that his power and love would secure them unfailing peace.

CHAPTER XVII.

VERSES 1—3.

Jesus only ceased from conversing with his disciples, to enter upon this solemn address to his Father. And it is in his character of redeemer and mediator that he prays. The hour for the great conflict was come; the eventful hour in which it was to be determined whether man should be finally consigned to the power of darkness, or be restored to liberty and hope. All still depended, as from the first, on the will of God. It was for him to consecrate, to accept, and glorify the victim, who now offered himself as the atonement, which should be sufficient to satisfy the demands of eternal justice against the guilty world. The Son thus sought the blessing of the Father under a new relation. Glorify thy Son as a Redeemer, and then thy Son can glorify thee in saving those who were lost! As a preliminary to the actual salvation of sinners, God had given his Son power over all mankind: over human nature itself: he had also fore-appointed him a people, separate from the mass; pre-ordained "to be holy, and without blame before him in love." It was to accomplish the work, for which so wonderful and sublime a preparation had been made, that Jesus now sought power, strength, and all the mightier influences of love, at the throne of his Father. This, his prayer for sanctifying, supporting grace, was the largest prayer for grace ever offered up. The right of Jesus to give life eternal, even to his people, rests upon his having paid the stipulated ransom. Hence the petition, "Glorify thy Son," that is, both perfect and accept him in the character of Redeemer. A prayer which he, who offered it, well knew would be granted; but which, in the relation in which he then stood to the Father, needed not the less to be made, because it was certainly to be fulfilled. The greater our

faith, the surer we are that all proper requests will be satisfied : but the more certain we are of this, the more earnestly do we pray. Jesus, regarding his own desire as fulfilled, contemplated the mode in which his people would be saved, as immediately depending upon their knowledge of the truth. This knowledge would have availed nothing without redemption ; but that being effected, to know God, and the Mediator, in such a way that the knowledge brings the soul into contact with them, is to have eternal life ; a knowledge of this kind implying both the faith which justifies, and the sanctification which quickens.

VERSES 4—8.

Jesus had already glorified his Father upon earth, for he had fulfilled all righteousness : he had performed every part of the work appointed him ; and he had made known to his disciples both the true nature, and the will, and the purposes of their God. In again praying to be glorified, he asks for glory, not as before, when he sought it only as the perfecting of the Redeemer's character and sacrifice ; but as an extension of the glory which he had in his Divine nature before the world was, to his human nature ; so that in his whole person, and not in his Godhead only, he might enjoy a full and undivided glory. His followers are described by marks which ought to be regarded as the proper characteristics of believers in all ages and countries. God had, from the first, chosen them for himself. He appointed them to be the disciples of his Son. From his Son they learnt the mystery of holiness : they accepted and obeyed the truth. And thus with all the people of Christ, as St. Paul expressly shews in Romans viii. 29, 30.

VERSES 9—13.

Let the characteristics of Christ's present followers be considered, and it will be at once seen why he so strongly distinguished the prayer which he offered up for them, from any prayer which it might be his intention to offer up for mankind in general. St. Paul might have introduced precisely the same exception into those sublime and impressive passages of the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians, where he prays for the saints—the faithful in Christ Jesus. The gifts and blessings which he asked for them, he could not properly have asked for persons not in their state, and he might, consequently, without any want of charity, have said, "I pray for them; I pray not for the world." Jesus speaks of his own, as he was now about to complete their deliverance, with peculiar tenderness. They seemed to become more precious to him, the more he felt the presentiment of redeeming agony at his heart. It was in them he saw the fruit of his travail, and was satisfied. He was glorified in them, because in them was accomplished both his own and his Father's will. While with them in the world, he protected them by such an exercise of the power which dwells in the name of God, as was proper to their state; now that he was about to depart, he commended them to the direct support and providence of his Father; his name being the expression under which he speaks of them, because by so doing, the mind of the believer is best led to associate whatever blessing he enjoys, with God himself, and with the direct action of his mercy. The name of God is the purest of all symbols: the medium through which, of all others, we can best contemplate the Divine perfections. When God, in infinite compassion, exercises on behalf of his people, that power and goodness which his name expresses, its first effect is to bring them into nearer communion with himself, and with each other. Separation, distance, in either

case, is the loss of good. The happiness sought by redemption is both the surer, and the intenser, the more complete the union in the family of God. Hence, when our Lord prays that the grace inherent in the Divine name, may guard and uphold his people, he looks beyond this, seeing in their union the ultimate fulfilment of his labours, his sufferings, and his prayers. That he had lost none of his true disciples, even while he, himself, was subject to all the infirmities of the flesh, and when poverty and persecution attended his steps, affords a grand proof of the prevailing force of his intercessions. Judas fell because he was, from the first, the son of perdition. Jesus did not lose him, as if he had belonged to him, in the same sense as the other disciples. He would not have been represented by Scripture as the lost one, had this been the case. Scripture was fulfilled by his fall, because it was both foreseen and foretold; and Jesus knew, from the beginning, who it was that should betray him. Even this, gloomy as the subject was in itself, entered into those things of which our Lord spake, as necessary to the peace and joy of his disciples. The prayer which he offered up secured them the fulness of his Father's blessing: and the proofs which he gave them of his own fore-knowledge and perfect wisdom, taught them how to overcome doubt, and answer the questionings of fear and disbelief.

VERSES 14—19.

Our Lord had given his disciples his Father's word, first by unfolding to them the real meaning of that which was already written; and then, by such further revelations respecting the Gospel as they were at present able to bear. There is a godlike force and life in the Divine word, however communicated. In the very lowest degree in which its power is put forth, it renovates and enlightens. But it is also made the medium of sanctifying grace; and thus our Lord prays his

Father to employ his word, the embodiment of truth, in producing that great change upon his people, which renders them like himself. With him, the work of sanctification consisted only in a glad acceptance of the Holy Spirit, designating and consecrating him to the office of Redeemer, and head of the church. He, being thus sanctified, obtained power to sanctify all who belong to him; but it is still by the word, or the truth, that he exercises this power, or looks to see it operating. The condition of his followers is strikingly set forth as determined by the influence of the sanctifying word. It separates them from the world: they thereby become exposed to the hatred of the world. But, neither the sinfulness, nor the hostility of the world, leads Jesus to desire their immediate removal. Holy himself, he came and dwelt among men, that they might see his glory, and learn from his teaching how it might be imitated. His followers are sanctified, not that they may be immediately taken from the world; but that their light also, in its humbler degree of splendour, may entice the souls of others to obey the heavenly calling.

VERSES 20—23.

This sentence, "Neither pray I for these alone," is precious, above all estimation, to us of this latter age. It might have been argued, that the wonderful things which our Lord now asked for his disciples, were asked for those only who had been with him from the beginning: that they might be the objects of his pre-eminent love, and might, consequently, be designated to a state of peculiar glory. But, by the addition, "Neither pray I for these alone," the circle traced by this sublimest and most wonderful of reported prayers, becomes large enough to embrace the whole happy multitude of true believers. For all whom the word of God has reached and sanctified, Jesus then asked that grandest of blessings, union with himself, union with his Father, union with each other.

He had already given them glory, first by bestowing upon those who constituted the beginning of his family, such grace as they were then capable of receiving ; and next, by appointing them an eternal inheritance in heaven. That which the earliest of his followers enjoyed, they attained to by the means employed for the salvation of every subsequent generation of believers, except that parts of the prayer are now receiving an immediate answer, whereas the first disciples had to wait a season of painful trial before they could enjoy the fruits of their Master's intercessions. It was his desire that the world might learn through them the truth of his doctrine, and his own divinity. This is assuredly as much the will of Jesus now, as it was when he thus prayed on earth. Nor can his faithful followers have a surer pledge of happiness, or greater encouragement to seek the holiness which shall make them like their Lord. Nothing certainly will he fail to give them, which can tend to their purity or their glory, when it is appointed that in them the world shall read the severest sentence on its baseness and disbelief.

VERSES 24—26.

The disciples, who heard this prayer, had been eye-witnesses of the trials and patience of Jesus. They were soon to behold his more terrible anguish. He might well, therefore, desire that those who had seen him in his humiliation and agony, might be spectators of his glory. But here again, although the language of the prayer had a close and striking application in respect to those first disciples, it does not exclusively belong to them. All believers are, in a true and most important sense of the word, spectators of the sufferings of Jesus. The Galatians were no more literally present at his death than later disciples ; and yet it is said that he was evidently set forth before them. This is the work of faith ; and the soul which humbles itself in thankful adoration, meditating on the

sufferings of its Redeemer, may be sure that it was regarded in this prayer; and that it will be a part of the triumph of Jesus, to see it, with a multitude of other such souls, standing in rapture before his throne, and contrasting the splendours of his glory with the darkness of the hour when he redeemed them by his cross. The conclusion of the prayer is an expression of sublime resignation, founded upon a perfect knowledge of the Divine goodness. In this knowledge, Jesus had reasons, of all sufficient force, to render him a willing sacrifice to his Father's righteousness; and he was no less assured that in proportion as this knowledge was possessed by his disciples, they too would confess the infinite wisdom and benevolence exercised in redemption; and would rejoice, with unspeakable satisfaction, in becoming partakers with him, the only begotten Son of God, in the love and glory of his Father.

CHAPTER XVIII.

VERSES 1—6.

The report given in this Gospel of our Lord's last discourse and prayer, affords an introduction to the history of his passion altogether peculiar, and as impressive as it is peculiar. It shews us the exact state of his own mind when on the eve of his great agony, and the degree of light which it was his will to grant the disciples entering, in some respects, with him, into the valley of the shadow of death. Invaluable as are the reports of the other Evangelists, they none of them give the particular knowledge conveyed by that of St. John; nor ought the Christian to consider himself fully prepared to contemplate aright the sufferings of Jesus, till he have patiently and devoutly studied this sublime preliminary to his death. We here learn what he most desired as the fruits of redemption; what would be his aim as the one mediator between God and man; and with what a perfect foresight,

and pre-enjoyment of the triumph, he looked beyond the abyss, now opening before him, into the realms of light and blessedness. There is an especial pathos in the sentence, "When Jesus had spoken these words he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron." That brook was a dark and turbid stream, when the waters were out; at other times, its course was only marked by a gloomy chasm, but it always formed a remarkable boundary line between the sunny slopes of the Mount of Olives, and the melancholy shades of Gethsemane. Jesus did not pass this line till he had filled his own soul, and the souls of his disciples, as far as they could receive it, with the foretaste and radiance of Divine joy. Thus prepared, he entered upon the scene of his agony, a scene which was associated with many familiar recollections, and which, it is probable, he had purposely frequented that nothing might be wanting to the proof of his foresight and design. The business of his apprehension was entirely in the hands of Judas. He led the men and officers sent by the priests and Pharisees. At present, the Romans, or civil power, had no part in the affair; and the strange, awful impression made upon the minds of the men by his words, "I am he," may be attributed to a peculiar Jewish sentiment, flashing momentarily through their minds, and compelling them to worship him as Messiah.

VERSES 7—14.

Our Lord met the perplexity of Judas and his followers by a dignified submission to their will. The terror and confusion which they felt in his presence could only be removed by his own word. John, as an eye-witness, was, no doubt, deeply impressed with this remarkable incident. Benignity, power, and prophetic wisdom, were all equally displayed in the next circumstance, the care, that is, which Jesus expressed for his disciples; and it is certainly well worth remarking, that the

only one of them lost was that very one who now appeared at the head of an armed band, prepared to perpetrate successful treason against his Master, and consign him to the cross. The subsequent history of Christ's disciples contains ample proof, that it is a very perilous experiment to seek gain by unfaithfulness to the Gospel or its author. Peter's conduct was the result of mere natural feeling; the act of a man full of generous sentiment, but deserving no praise as connected with holiness or faith. Had it been in his power, he would evidently either have wrenched the cup from our Lord's hand, or rudely emptied it of its contents. He thought very differently when he spoke of "the trial of faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth." 1 Ep. i. 7. Our Lord's remark to Peter seems to have been intended to effect the secondary purpose of encouraging the officers to proceed with their work. They therefore took him, and proceeded to the house of Annas, the same probably as that of Caiaphas. Annas, according to St. Luke, shared with his son-in-law the dignity of the high priesthood. This could only have been by sufferance. It was evidently contrary to Divine law. But supposing that Annas had been deposed by the Romans, the Jews might still regard him as properly the high priest; and Caiaphas, both on account of his relationship, and from regard to his age and experience, might gladly allow all difficult causes to be first submitted to his judgment. The examination of Jesus was likely to involve many hard questions. Annas represented the strictest party among the Jews. Upon him, therefore, the enemies of Jesus thought they might most safely depend. But the name of Caiaphas is mentioned immediately after, in order to shew that the authority to which they thus appealed was not in opposition to the legitimate tribunal.

VERSES 15—18.

John himself, our present Evangelist, was "that disciple." His entering the palace, and being known to the high priest, are somewhat remarkable circumstances, considering his humble rank. But innumerable, and probable, conjectures may be advanced to explain the difficulty. John may have been known to the high priest through some peculiarity of mind and talent: he may have gained the notice of this great man by a manifestation of zeal and devotion which promised usefulness in that age of excitement. Caiaphas, it is evident, from his disposition to prophecy, was a man of strong, enthusiastic feeling, and John was very likely to be viewed as one of the class calculated to assist in regenerating the nation. Had he not, indeed, become an apostle of Jesus, he might have been an invaluable agent of the high priest Caiaphas. It proved an unhappy thing for Peter that the interest of his fellow-disciple enabled him to follow Jesus so closely in the hour of trial. A very important lesson may be learnt from this incident. Peter was surreptitiously brought in; nor was he prepared for the position to which he was thus introduced by the injudicious kindness of his friend. He accordingly denied his Lord at the first appearance of difficulty and danger. And thus it generally is with those whom inconsiderate affection places in situations where a stronger, maturer, more enlightened faith is required than that to which they have attained. They sin grievously, as Peter did, if they yield to fear; but those who expose them to the danger sin also, as John, it is not improbable, considered he himself had done. It may even be questioned whether the warmth and cheerful blaze of the fire, and the rude, wanton talk of the servants, with whom Peter so readily joined, may not have had great influence in lessening his readiness to follow Jesus to prison or to death.

VERSES 19—27.

We learn from verse 24, that the high priest, who thus questioned Jesus, was Caiaphas, not Annas. The enquiry which he made seems to have consisted of useless and insulting questions. Our Lord's doctrine, his conduct, and the character of his followers were matters of notoriety. Countless witnesses might have been brought to prove his perfect freedom from any offence against the law. His answer to the unjust and disingenuous course of his judge was equally dignified and prudent. A generous heart swells with indignation at seeing a blow inflicted on one so good and holy. But this feeling is immediately converted into the still better sentiment of meekness and patience, if the sublime example of the blessed Jesus be thoroughly received and understood. Peter had by this time warmed and comforted himself; and the laugh and chit-chat of his companions had stopped his course of inward prayer. He was worse than unprepared for a trial of courage and faith, and he sinned accordingly.

VERSES 28—32.

Nothing could be more opposite than the judicial character of Caiaphas, the high priest of the Jews, and that of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. The one was under the influence of the fiercest prejudices, and administered a system which, originally pure and Divine, had been mixed up with human inventions which left little of its proper force either available or discernible. The other was the representative of a people remarkable for their lofty notions of justice, and the laws which were to guide his course afforded one of the best proofs of social advancement. By the former of these judges, justice was subordinated to the fierce passions and designs of a faction. In the trial of Jesus it was unthought of. He was condemned because he came to re-establish righteousness.

When taken before the tribunal of the Roman magistrate, he was fairly examined, and justly declared innocent. In this both the enlightened character and ordinary justice of the judge, and the equity of the system which he administered, were equally conspicuous. The contrast between the proceedings before Caiaphas and Pilate is as striking as the contrast in their characters. But this availed nothing. It was the hour of darkness ; and the justice of the Roman yielded as basely to the suggestions of political fear as Judas to those of avarice and envy. Pilate would have been glad to escape the ignominy of condemning an innocent man. Hence his wish to transfer the cause from his own court to that of the Jews. The latter would have very readily undertaken the final trial of Jesus ; but they knew that if they did, his punishment must be short of death. It seems to have been both a wise and a merciful measure of the Romans to check the headlong zealotry of the conquered Jews, by depriving them of the right to inflict capital punishment. Wonderful also it is, that by our Lord's condemnation in the heathen court, his own prophecy, and that of the ancient Scriptures, as to the mode of his death, was fulfilled. Had he been put to death by the Jews, he would probably have been stoned. Crucifixion was a Roman punishment ; and known as one combining all the peculiar characteristics proper to a death undertaken to atone for sin.

VERSES 33—40.

This passage is full of interest and important meaning. Pilate had, as yet, confined his examination to the Jews. Their answers to his questions had convinced him that prejudice and malice were the cause of their present proceedings. He now, therefore, turned to Jesus himself, and the first question which he put to him shews, that, however confused and erroneous his notions, there was a glimmering of light

in his mind ; just enough, that is, to make him suspect there was better foundation for the pretensions of Jesus than his enemies were ready to allow. "Art thou the king of the Jews ?" The possibility of his being the inheritor of the throne of David was allowed in the enquiry. When Jesus answered, "Sayest thou this of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me ?" he seems to have intended to give a definite and prominent character to the reports respecting him, forcing, as it were, upon Pilate the consideration of the important fact, that the Jewish nation was greatly divided on the subject of his pretensions. Pilate's doubts were increased by the recollection, that the Jews themselves did partially announce, that the prisoner before him was their long-expected sovereign. Many among them had actually proclaimed him, and the very agitation which existed forbade the idea that Jesus was a mere ordinary pretender. Our Lord saw the working of Pilate's mind, and cautiously taught him the distinction between an earthly and a spiritual kingdom. Pilate instantly apprehended his meaning as to the broad, essential differences between a dominion founded on mind and spirit, and the common rule of worldly potentates. Still he saw that Jesus claimed a dignity and a power which could not be resolved into that kind of superiority which any man of high intellect might claim. "Art thou a king, then ?" was his question now. It was not, "Art thou the king of the Jews ?" but simply, "Art thou a king ?" There was, it appears, that in the mode of Pilate's speaking which rendered the question equivalent almost to an acknowledgment of the mysterious royalty of Jesus. But much more was required of him than this. The mention of truth threw him back upon his vague notions, upon the baseless fabric of idolatry, or the equally bewildering regions of a speculative philosophy. Still we have no right to believe that there was the slightest touch of ridicule or scorn in his question, "What is truth ?" The

enquiry was that of a man not disposed to jest, but of one wretched and perplexed. His conduct shews this. When he left the judgment seat, it was to persuade the Jews to set Jesus free. Their conduct was that of men hardened rather than blinded by inveterate malice.

CHAPTER XIX.

VERSES 1—7.

Pilate yielded only so far as any worldly man would have done to the exigency of his situation. That he struggled in every way against the fierce and haughty enemies of Jesus may be attributed to what little benevolence belonged to his natural temper, and the education which he had received, or, still more, to the impression made on his mind by the words and appearance of Jesus. But it would have required a much stronger barrier to resist the pressure of the worldly fears, and political considerations, which rushed upon him ; and, after a brief, but not weak or indifferent, struggle with these enemies of his honesty, he gave way to the infamous confederates against their king. The return of doubt : the compunctions feelings with which he looked at the lacerated form of Jesus, bleeding from the scourge ; the strange alarm which disturbed him when he heard that it was not as a king merely, but as the Son of God, that Jesus claimed homage ; all these points deserve minute attention. They are the witnesses which a plain history brings to determine the controversy between the injustice, the sophistry and wickedness of the world, and the simple holiness of Jesus.

VERSES 8—12.

Pilate felt that his doubts could be dissipated only by Jesus himself. “ Whence art thou ? ” was an enquiry which shewed that, notwithstanding all his worldliness, this heathen governor

was now traversing, in thought, regions which lay far beyond the bourn of earthly dominion. Jesus gave him no answer to his present question. However excited his mind, it was not in a state to receive the only fitting reply which could have been properly given him. But it was not so with regard to his further question, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee?" He could easily understand the clear and positive denial with which Jesus met his implied assertion. "Thou hast not power against me. Thou art but permitted, as an agent in the hand of Providence, to perform the part thou executest. Thy sin is great, because thy will is prepared to consent where it ought to resist: but the iniquity of the original offender is greater than thine." Pilate may, possibly, have felt the truth of our Lord's words, and understood that he was being urged on to the commission of a crime by the force of a spirit mightier than his own. Pride, as well as the mysterious warnings of his conscience, may thus have come to his aid at this moment, and made him, for the instant, the advocate of justice, and of Christ. The argument which overcame all his scruples, was refined and subtle; but based on an utter falsehood. Even if Jesus had claimed a royal state, he might have been as little an enemy of Cæsar, or the Romans, as the Herods were. But it was palpable that he did not make himself a king, so as to be the rival of any earthly potentate, and the lie which charged him with political treason, was as extravagant on the one side, as the blasphemy was gross, which, on the other, imputed his miracles to the agency of Satan.

VERSES 13—18.

Pilate was, certainly, in no jesting humour. Whatever his notions respecting Jesus, they were unmixed with either scorn or ridicule. He could not comprehend the mystery of the Kingdom of God, or of Heaven; but he evidently understood

that the Jews rejected Jesus, whether considered as their king, or as a prophet and teacher, because he was too good and holy for them. Hence his reiterated mention of Jesus as their king. There was a volume of stern, bitter reproaches in the question, "Shall I crucify your king?" Slight differences exist in the literal, or circumstantial narrative of the crucifixion and resurrection, as given by John and the other Evangelists. But the mode of accounting for these discrepancies has been already suggested. Though one of the Evangelists speaks of the third hour, that is, nine in the morning, as the time of the crucifixion, and another states, that it took place at the sixth hour, that is, at noon, there may be no real contradiction in the two statements. The one writer may have regarded the very commencement, the other the more advanced stages of the awful proceeding. We here also miss some particulars recorded in the other Gospels; but we never miss Jesus himself from these Divine narratives. We fail not, except by our own fault, to see him "bearing his cross," or risen from the dead; and promising salvation to believers.

VERSES 19—24.

We learn an important circumstance from the 22nd verse. Pilate worded the superscription for the cross according to his own feeling. It is evident that the chief priests would not have worded it in the same way. The three languages were those then in use among the mixed multitudes inhabiting or visiting Jerusalem. Pilate's object was gained, if he really wished to reprove the enemies of Jesus, for the Jews generally who read the inscription must have uttered many doubtful expressions, or the chief priests would have had no cause to go so anxiously to Pilate, and entreat him to alter the writing. His answer was plain and dignified, though, perhaps, the fruit of mingled impatience and remorse. A fulfil-

ment of prophecy like that here recorded might be esteemed of little weight if it occurred alone ; but as one of many, making up a broad tissue of circumstantial proof that the whole history of Jesus was foreseen, it is of great value.

VERSES 25—27.

Not only love and pious tenderness were exhibited by these devout women at the cross, but a fortitude which grace alone could have planted in their hearts. The mother of Jesus had been told that “ a sword should pierce through her soul,” but she had strength given her to meet the blow ; and as she and her companions stood close by the cross, witnessing the agony of one so dearly loved, they exhibited an example of heroism at least as sublime as any ever recorded of female suffering and devotion. John gained the happy privilege of becoming a son to Mary by being at her side in this hour of bitter grief. But it was not by accident, or sudden impulse, he was there. The long, patient teaching of affection had prepared him for this hour, and for the duty assigned him. We should form a very inadequate idea of the intentions of Jesus in committing his mother to the care of John, if we supposed it was only to secure her a home. He knew that John was the best fitted of all his followers to commune with her on those grand themes which were most likely to temper her present sorrows with animating hopes, and noble views of the future.

VERSES 28—37.

“ Thy will be done ” was ever in the mind of Jesus, as he contemplated his Father’s holiness, and the designs of his eternal wisdom. Astonishing indeed was that state of soul which enabled him, while at the very height of his agony, to view the vast field of prophecy, to read the whole volume of divine decrees concerning him, and so to ponder every minute

particular that he could find only one little circumstance now wanting to make the entire of his wondrous life tally to the uttermost exactness with his fore-written as well as pre-ordered course. That one point also fulfilled, he crowned the whole by dying, securing in that final act both the redemption of his people, and his own return to glory. The custom of breaking the legs of the crucified had probably been introduced partly from mercy, and partly from the impatience of the executioners. In some cases the sufferers were many hours in dying. Instances are recorded in which life was retained for above two days. The appearance of our Lord must have been very remarkable, to satisfy the soldiers so immediately that he was dead. It is not unlikely that death, in his case, had wrought with its completest force; not only really ending life, but obliterating the traces and flitting shadows of its presence which will sometimes almost cheat us into the notion that the dead still breathe. The one rude soldier who pierced the side of Jesus acted probably in mere recklessness; but he added an important item to fulfilled prophecy, and Christian evidence. The death of the sufferer was still more plainly shewn; and the water and blood which flowed from the wound afforded an illustration of spiritual mysteries never to be forgotten. It is not necessary to determine physically whether the water was purely water. St. John saw that the stream which gushed from the torn side of his Master was, in appearance, blood and water, and his mind was immediately and permanently impressed with the feeling which he afterwards expressed doctrinally, "This is he which came not by water only, but by water and blood." 1 John v. 6.

VERSES 38—42.

We still see the tendency of Pilate's notions in regard to Jesus. Had he viewed him as an ordinary criminal, he would

certainly not have cared to listen to any such request as that now made to him. But there is another point of some importance. Jesus had been represented as likely to prove dangerous to the government, by laying claim to a throne. When Joseph of Arimathsea, a man of wealth and consequence, presented himself before Pilate, the latter could not fail to see that the cause of Jesus had a foundation not to be rooted up by his death. But, notwithstanding, he courteously granted the request of the rich counsellor; shewing thereby, that he not only repudiated the notion that there was any mixture of treason in the movements of Jesus, or his party, but that he could discover in them an element of truth and greatness which demanded respect. Doubts are entertained as to whether the "preparation" here spoken of was the preparation for the ordinary Sabbath, or for the passover as well as the Sabbath. That the former only is intended is generally supposed.

CHAPTER XX.

VERSES 1—10.

Did we know the exact order, and the minute particulars of the manner, in which the witnesses of the resurrection became acquainted with the event, we should, no doubt, have the most ready evidence of their veracity. But we have from each only a fragment of a fragment of what would have been the whole history, supposing an entire narrative had existed. The object of the Holy Spirit was to record such particulars as might in themselves furnish direct evidence of the main facts. A minute, formal record, written by one person, would not have produced the same conviction on the mind of an ordinary reader as four narratives, like our Gospels, written by independent authors. And while it would not have been so useful in the case of an individual,

it would have been incomparably less so in regard to the church, or to mankind, at large. The circumstantial evidence of the four gospels, when drawn out, and considered with due attention, is of an extent far beyond that of a direct history, however well founded and accredited. Though we may read, therefore, in one of these narratives a particular account of circumstances not noticed in another, or glanced over so as to give them a different form, if the fact itself, to which they are wholly subordinate, be precisely the same in all, we have no reason to doubt but that these secondary particulars may be regarded as essentially worthy of assent. In all the Gospels, the early visit of the devout women to the tomb of Jesus affords a beautiful example of holy affection, expressing itself in the best way it could, according to opportunity. The blessed Jesus was buried. Nothing better could be done to show him honour than to embalm his body with sweet and precious spices. Now, the homage which he requires is, that we present ourselves, purified by his blood, sanctified by his spirit, a holy sacrifice, acceptable through him unto his Father. If we partake at all of the affection which animated his first disciples, we shall ever be anticipating the morning light in thus manifesting our love to Jesus. We cannot reach his throne in thought or prayer before he have ascended it ; but we may, by zeal and love, so tutor our hearts that they shall by their very instincts be with Christ at every awakening to consciousness. John himself, "that other disciple," was satisfied, on finding the tomb empty, that his Master had triumphed over death. He cared about nothing else. Peter was in a less ecstatic state, and could more quietly consider the appearance of the tomb. "For, as yet, they knew not the Scripture," refers not to their feelings after viewing the tomb, but to their original doubts.

VERSES 11—18.

Many reasons might be suggested for the appearance of the angels to Mary Magdalene, and for that of our Lord immediately following. But it is enough to know that she was standing weeping at his tomb, and that the tears which she shed were those of a broken spirit, and an equally contrite and loving heart. Little as she as yet knew of redemption, properly considered, she understood well enough that her present freedom from the power of Satan was owing to the mercy of Jesus, and that, by some mysterious necessity, he could not have exercised that mercy so efficaciously, had he not been ready to subject himself to death. But as she wept at the grave of her deliverer, so she was permitted to enjoy the wonderful delight of beholding him in the first hour of his triumph over death and hell. And this incident in the case of Mary Magdalene, may be taken as an encouragement for every true penitent. Let us weep for Christ, dying to redeem us, and we shall be permitted to rejoice, by faith, in his resurrection to glory. It is not quite clear why he said to Mary, "Touch me not," because that he had "not yet ascended to his Father." Very possibly, however, he may not have referred to the mere literal act of Mary's approach to touch him, so much as to the general expression of her countenance, which indicated that she then supposed his glory was absolutely fulfilled, and that she, and his other disciples, might then retain him permanently among them. This was an error akin to that which would have prevented his descending into the grave. It sprung from an imperfect knowledge of the full method of human redemption: of the means by which the way to the holy of holies was to be opened to regenerate man.

VERSES 19—25.

This appearance of our Lord, however wonderful as demonstrating his power over death, would have only served to inspire his disciples with astonishment and awe, but for the salutation, full of gracious meaning, “Peace be unto you.” So it is with any degree of faith in his resurrection, or in any other proof of his power, glory, or divinity. It is not the assurance of the truth connected with fact or doctrine, which can, of itself, create joy. Like the first disciples, we might even see the Lord, and own him as such; but till he said “Peace be unto you,” we should fail of that personal delight in the knowledge of his victory, without which, like all the other mysteries of godliness, this of the resurrection would be something outward, foreign to ourselves: a wonderful fact, but not so connected with our own future existence, as to make us glad because we had seen the Lord. Jesus repeated the blessing, as he announced to the disciples the duties with which they were to be charged as ministers of his gospel. But he did not give peace only. He gave the Holy Spirit with it; and when he had bestowed these wonderful and efficacious gifts, but not till then, he authorized the messengers of his truth to pronounce, that the sins of supposed penitents and believers were remitted or retained, pardoned or not. Whatever view, therefore, may be entertained on the subject of ministerial absolution, nothing further can be deduced from this passage than that, when Jesus bestows his peace,—that comprehensive word for all evangelical blessings,—and gives the Holy Spirit, and calls those upon whom he has conferred these endowments, to go forth and preach his word, they may, in his name, assure the penitent believer of pardon, and reject the dissembler as unworthy of the Divine favour. The power to remit or retain sins was evidently only given in connection with the substantial, living graces, which filled the disciples

with a new and heavenly life. As God sent his Son, the image of his glory and perfections, so the Son now sent forth his disciples. But before commissioning them to perform the work to which he devoted them, he converted, sanctified, quickened, illuminated them with his own Spirit. He has, doubtless, continued to raise up a succession of such ministers; but in so far as he has done this, he has also continued to say, "Peace be unto you," and "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Where there is not good evidence that he has done this, it is but presumption to suppose that he has said, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you :" and it is surely the most monstrous of all errors to imagine, that the man who has received neither the gifts, nor the commission which Christ alone can bestow, has the right, authoritatively, to tell his fellow-sinners, that they may enter the Kingdom of Heaven, or must remain without. Let the Church be acknowledged as pre-eminently, and in a large sense, the minister of Christ. But if the Son, himself, could do nothing but what he saw the Father do, is it to be believed that the Church can do what Christ did not? That it can endow unqualified men with an authority which he confined to those only whom he enriched with the fullest measure of his grace?

VERSES 24—29.

Where that, with which we are concerned, is minutely, and essentially true, every circumstance, the most ordinary accident, will serve to increase the evidence in its favour. It is especially so with regard to the Gospel. Thomas was probably absent from no very trivial cause: but how important, how interesting are the circumstances to which his absence gave rise? He acted unreasonably in disputing the assertions of men so good and faithful as his fellow disciples. They were now speaking also under the influence of the Holy Ghost; but he had not, as yet, been made a partaker of this gift; and

from his case we may learn, that the highest spiritual endowments, on the part of those who speak, are not to be viewed as compensating the want of grace on the part of those who hear. But Thomas did not reason. He yielded to mere natural doubts and instincts. That his Lord had not perished; was doubtless, the conviction of his earnest and devout heart: but it was contrary to all his pre-conceived ideas, that, instead of going straight to heaven, the blessed Jesus should appear again on earth, and in the very body which had died upon the cross. His disbelief was not in the truth of Jesus, or in the reality of his return to life, but in his re-appearance bodily. Had it extended beyond this, he would have been an outcast from the circle of his brethren. The evidence which he asked for entirely respected the identity of our Lord's body; and when another week was passed, and Jesus again appeared among his disciples, this evidence was accorded him, and it produced an effect upon his mind which carried it far beyond the mere conviction that Jesus lived again in the body which had been crucified. The miracle of his resurrection was so stupendous, that it involved, as a consequence, in the reasoning of Thomas, the deity of Jesus. He could not look upon him now as man only. "My Lord and my God," was the brief recital of a creed embracing all that can be said, in the best and truest words, on the nature of our deliverer. It was a happy thing for Thomas to have attained to faith, however reached. But he did not escape without rebuke; and we are taught by our Saviour's words to understand, that the degree of our blessedness and comfort, at least for a time, is not independent of the mode by which we learn to believe. Thomas, after due chastisement, entered, with his fellow disciples, into the full joy of his Lord. And so, doubtless, will every real believer, however he has attained to justifying faith; but, peculiarly blessed are they who have become believers with the lowest help from outward evidence, and who have thereby

evinced more directly their ready assent to the word of God, and the first effects of his grace. Our Lord, in speaking of those who had not seen, and yet had believed, referred to a class, consisting first of those who lived in early times, as Job, and others of like mind: and then of those, his humble followers, who had not ventured to press into the circle of the Apostles, and their immediate associates, but who had believed, with a literal confidence, in every word which he had uttered; and were now as ready to believe, in consequence of that word, that he was risen from the dead, as if they had seen him with their eyes. So also with us who live in a later age: blessed are we if we believe by the Word and Spirit.

VERSES 30—31.

Curiosity might be better satisfied, had the wonders here alluded to, been minutely described. But faith, and even right reason, must be far better pleased to know, that the riches of the power of Jesus are inexhaustible: that he did not work a miracle now and then, but that he was, himself, the fulfilment of his prophetic name, “The Wonderful,” affording some sign of his power every step he set.

C H A P T E R X X I.

VERSES 1—7.

Our Lord's appearances were not confined to one place, or any particular time. Those before described by St. John, occurred when the disciples were met together in a retired apartment, on the first day of the week, and for the purpose of solemn converse and united prayer. The present appearance was vouchsafed at the dawn of an ordinary day, and when those who enjoyed the blessed visitation, were busily employed about their common, humble labour. It was not for pleasure that they were thus occupied, but from duty and

necessity. They were at present dependent upon their own resources for a maintenance. The time was not yet come, when, preaching the gospel, they might look to be fed, as labourers worthy of their hire ; and no intimation is given that they had any right to expect a miracle to meet their wants. But now that their honest efforts proved unsuccessful, their Lord was present to supply their temporal necessities, and greatly increase the consolation of their souls. This is not an unfrequent method in God's procedure with his people. When he helps them in their trouble, and they acknowledge his mercy, his presence is made more than ever manifest to them, and his words enter their hearts with a fresh and mightier vitality. That the disciples on this, as in some other instances, did not at once recognize Jesus, may be accounted for, either by the state of the light in which he was seen ; by the various raiment, different in form or colour, which he wore ; or by the mere confusion consequent on the sudden appearance of a stranger, utterly unlooked for. It is very characteristic of John, that he was the first to discover that it was Jesus ; and no less so of Peter, that he could not resist his impatience, but flung himself into the sea that he might be the first to fall at his Lord's feet.

VERSES 8—14.

If we observe minute incidents, here is one not unworthy of attention. It might be supposed that the other disciples, who came so slowly towards Jesus in comparison with Peter, were less fervent in their love to him : but when we read that they came "dragging the net with fishes," it immediately appears, that their later approach was not for want of zeal, but in subserviency to a practical duty. Had they, in the fervour of devotion, let the net go, filled, as it was, with fishes, which the Lord had enabled them to take, it is very doubtful whether he would have accepted their worship, or so lovingly shared

their repast. We are not told who lit the fire, or placed the fish on it, but as far as the wording of the narrative is concerned, Peter, or any other disciple, who reached the shore before those who were dragging the net, may have made this hasty preparation for the meal. An unusual degree of awe seems to have impressed the minds of the disciples at this appearance of Jesus; and he met it with a proportionable expression of tenderness and friendship. "Bring of the fish which ye have caught." "Come and dine:" and, finding even this scarcely enough to inspire a cheerful trust in his love, he took of the viands, and served them himself.

VERSES 15—19.

Peter's zeal and affection were as sincere as they were ardent, but they required a careful discipline. It was easy for him to think that he loved his lord with a love far exceeding that of the other disciples. The first question which Jesus put to him corrected this species of pride, for he humbly answered, not that he loved him better than the rest, but that he knew he really loved him. A practical proof of this was immediately instituted: "teach, guide, comfort, the poorest, the simplest, the most ignorant, of my people." The question is repeated, and a similar answer returned. Again the proof is prescribed. "Instruct and nourish the members of my church in general." In our Lord's scrutiny into Peter's love, we see not merely his desire to quicken the self-watchfulness of Peter himself, but to instruct all his followers, by this memorable example, to examine their hearts, and then prove their faith and love by unwearied diligence in the path of duty. But something more was to be told Peter. He had been wilful in his early manhood; and vigorous health, and a bold, ardent soul, had prompted him to pursue his free course with no other consideration than his own desire. This is the meaning of our Lord, "When thou wert young, thou

girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest." But now the contrast. Having become a servant of God, his own will was subject to that of his Lord: he was to fulfil his purposes, not his own; and the time was coming when, after patient labour and suffering, the executioner would gird him; not that he might exercise his strength in some feat of manhood as of old, but that he might be led to the cross, a course so hateful to the mere natural will, there to prove how ready, having been indeed converted, he was to obey the last injunction of his beloved Master, "Follow me."

VERSES 20—25.

John finishes his narrative with an interesting circumstance concerning himself. Peter may have felt some surprise that our Lord did not question John as to his love. He alone had been called by Jesus to follow him, and when he saw John close behind, there may have been the further feeling, that a conversation, instructions, perhaps revelations, intended only for himself, would lose part of their value if shared by another. Peter had not yet been made perfect in love. It is evident that the enquiry which we make of Christ, from a vain or wrong motive, is not likely to receive a direct or satisfactory answer. Peter's own course was plain: it was to follow his Master, whithersoever he might then, or at any other time, please to lead him. That which John was to do, he would tell John himself; and none of the other disciples would have had any cause to complain, or find fault, if it had really been the will of Jesus to leave this one of his followers alive upon the earth, even to the last day. But such was not his intention; nor did he mean to intimate that it was so by the words which he spoke. John lived to be a very aged man. He saw, indeed, the remarkable manifestation of his Lord's power in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the Jewish polity, having survived that event. This may, possibly, have been

the coming alluded to by our Lord : but it is not probable that he would have spoken of it in reference to one of whom it was questioned whether he was to die or not. The event alluded to in such a case, must have been very remote. This would answer to the coming of our Lord properly considered ; but not to the destruction of Jerusalem, which was to take place in about forty years. John himself may not have fully penetrated the meaning of our Lord as to the period to which his life on earth should be extended ; but this he plainly shews, that he had no expectation of passing from this world to a better without dying.

Precious as is every line, every incident of the four Gospels, a thoughtful and devout mind cannot but feel ready to exclaim, when reading the last words of St. John, "why not have recorded more of those wonderful sayings ; of those grand and lofty deeds of our Lord, lying in heaped up masses in your memory ?" But let us rest satisfied that in this, as in all other things, the wisdom of God has done what is best, and that we have the exact measure of information which is proper for us. Let us still further comfort ourselves with the cheering hope, a hope which may almost amount to assurance, that hereafter all those buried treasures of knowledge, for a time hidden from our eyes, will be revealed, and that we shall hear, perhaps from the lips of the loving and ecstatic John himself, of those other things which Jesus did ; and which, though it would have filled the world with books, had they been written, we shall then have time enough to learn, and clearer spirits to understand.

THE END.

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